A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF FALUNGONG IN CHINA: INHERITANCE OF TRADITION, CONTEMPORARY APPEALS, AND CHALLENGE TO THE SOCIAL ORDER

by

Weiming D. Yao

B.A., Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, 1982

M.A., Wake Forest University, 1993

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2004

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Weiming D. Yao

It was defended on

June 15, 2004

and approved by

Choyun Hsu

Lestor Olson

Carol Stabile

Gordon Mitchell

John Lyne
Dissertation Director

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Abstract

This dissertation is a critical inquiry of Falungong's beliefs, practices, and influences. Attention to given to its inheritance of past tradition of Taoism and Buddhism, its contemporary cultural, moral and sociological appeals, and its challenge to the social order in contemporary China. Initially appearing to offer therapy to the socially disadvantaged, Falungong's influences reach into religion, sociology, political science, and medical anthropology. In order to understand the movement in the context of contemporary Chinese politics, the discussion is carried out against the backdrop of Chinese political culture.

This project is an interdisciplinary analysis that synthesizes scholarship on Chinese history, religion, political science, medical anthropology with rhetorical criticism and public argument as the main analytical tools. Li Hongzhi's writings and Falungong members' testimonies are analyzed in order to glean the cultural, political, and moral values behind their words. Editorials in the *People's Daily,* and the Chinese leadership's speeches and documents are also discussed extensively to illustrate how Falungong's argument with the Chinese leadership over human rights, and, in particular, freedom of belief is carried out discursively. Attempts are also made to draw out implied meanings

and significance to uncover how historical, moral, and cultural forces influence and shape the Falungong phenomenon.

Chapter one provides an introduction of Falungong's beliefs and practices, its point of contention with the Chinese leadership, its organizational systems, and its cause of occurrence. Chapter two discusses how the movement inherits from and uses in a creative manner classical traditions in its contention with the Chinese leadership by tracing its roots in Taoism, Buddhism, and White Lotus. In chapter three, I uncover how Falungong and the Chinese leadership produce rhetorical discourses in a contemporary setting informed by their interpretations of disputed traditional values. In chapter four, I talk about Falungong's therapeutic role, its idealism, and its formation of critical consciousness in members, which constitute its contemporary sociological, cultural, and moral appeals. As this contemporary spiritual dissident movement is inherently linked to Chinese political culture, in chapter five, I explore the ideological foundations of the Chinese leadership through its rhetorical expression, as shaped by Marxist materialism, authoritarianism, and scientism. I contend that Falungong makes a distinct departure from these political values. In chapter six, I provide discussions on Falungong's contribution to humanism as a response to and a critique of Chinese communist political culture.

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Acknowledgments

I thank John Lyne, my dissertation advisor, for his directorship in the completion of my dissertation. I also want to thank Ron Zboray, the director of graduate studies, in assisting me in my final stage of revision. I want to thank Choyun Hsu, Dr. Lester Olson, Dr. Carol Stabile, and Dr. Gordon Mitchell, my dissertation committee members, for their constructive comments. Haihui Zhang from East Asian Library of University of Pittsburgh read the early version of my manuscript. Her suggestions are most helpful. John Wills has been consistent in correcting the stylistic mistakes of my dissertation. Due to his help, my manuscript reads better. I also want to thank Qian Zhang who read an early version of chapter four and offered valuable suggestions. Finally I want to express my gratitude to Mary Saracino Zborary. She spent a great deal of time reading parts of my manuscript and answering my questions. She is instrumental in helping me become a fine scholar.

Chapter One

Introduction

It has been five years since the Chinese government first suppressed the Falungong movement. Yet, as a social phenomenon, its rise and its immense popularity still intrigue the Chinese and westerners alike. They are interested in questions such as how and why Falungong, an ordinary spiritual group, could attract a large following, including veteran Chinese Communist Party members? Why did the Chinese government perceive a health exercise group as a grave threat? Is there something more complex and profound in the movement than its professed narrow claim to offer therapy and spiritual transcendence to the socially disadvantaged?

Indeed, China watchers have reasons to suspect that the Falungong phenomenon is more complicated than meets the eye. In the present research, I argue that Falungong is an unusual by-product of twentieth-century China's drastic socioeconomic transformation. Though Falungong initially appears as a health exercise group offering therapy to the socially marginalized, its significance goes beyond its publicly claimed goal of healing the "sick," and reaches into political, moral, sociological, and religious arenas of contemporary Chinese society. Falungong's political inclination is subtle. From the onset, its leaders proclaimed that it did not have a political agenda to unseat the Chinese government. Yet, the movement's non-compliant collective actions and its goal of clamoring for freedom of belief constitute serious challenges to the attempt of the central government to control the bodies and minds of the Chinese people. Its critique of the Chinese leadership also comes from its efforts to uphold an alternative morality to

that prescribed by the regime. Sociologically, Falungong plays a humanitarian role for the vast number of socially disadvantaged, a role the government has not been able to perform. In religious terms, while incorporating classical religions into its ideological beliefs, Falungong inherits Taoism and Buddhism as its cultural ethos.

Literature Review

Falungong is still an understudied research topic five years after its suppression, though a few new titles are published each year. The titles that have come out usually have distinct shortcomings. One category of works is mostly descriptive with little or no critical analysis at all. They are usually compilations of documents or introductions of Falungong. The other category includes works that offer analyses but tend to focus only on one single subject of discussion. In this regard, *China Quarterly* has published several articles with introductions or analyses on a few aspects of Falungong. However, for its complexity and immense popularity, readers need a large-scale critical work on Falungong that provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the movement. My dissertation aims to fill this need. It is offers a broad and in-depth critical inquiry of Falungong, as I am interested in finding out Falungong's uses of ancient traditions, its contemporary cultural, moral, and sociological appeals, and its challenge to the social order. I also situate the research within the context of Chinese political culture and analyze the movement in relation to its conflict with the Chinese leadership. I differ from most previously published authors in that I provide a critical interpretation of facts and observations, and thereafter, through an interdisciplinary approach, draw out implied meanings and hidden significance to deepen our understanding of Falungong.

The published works that are descriptive includes *The Mystery of China's Falun Gong: Its Rise and Sociological Implications* by John Wong and William T. Liu,[1] the first published title on Falungong, with two short articles by Wong and Liu. The book was released in 1999 at the height of the official suppression of the Falungong Movement. Being the first ever to write about Falungong, the authors introduced Falungong to western readers. However, the articles were written in haste and did not deal with Falungong adequately from an analytical perspective. *Falun Gong's Challenge to China* by Danny Schechter,[2] appeared a year later. Essentially a compilation of documents, his book provides an accurate description of Falungong. It contains Li Hongzhi's teachings, Falungong practitioners' testimonies, *People's Daily* editorials as well reactions from the international community. However, the book does not offer any critical analysis. Published in the same year of 2000 is the title *Power of the Wheel: the Falungong Revolution.*[3] As a general introduction to Falungong, this book lacks academic rigor. Maria Hsia Chang's *Falungong: the End of Days*, is the most recent publication on Falungong. It is the first scholarly writing in book form to provide comprehensive introduction to Falungong. Chang helps readers to understand Li Hongzhi's writings by offering simple and lucid interpretations. She also makes contribution in framing the discussion of Falungong in the context of contemporary Chinese politics. The shortcoming of Chang's book is that it lacks critical analysis.

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[1] John Wong and William Liu, *Mystery of China's Falungong: Its Rise and Sociological Implication* (Singapore City: Singapore University Press, 1999).

[2] Danny Schechter, *Falungong's Challenge to China: Spiritual Practice or "Evil Cult"* (New York: Akashic Books, 2000).

[3] Ian Adams, Riley Adams and Rocco Galati, *Power of the Wheel: The Falun Gong Revolution* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 2000).

The second category of published titles that offer critical, but narrowly conceived analyses on Falungong, include several articles published in *China Quarterly.* "An Organizational Analysis of the *Falun Gong*" by James Tong, carried in the September issue of *China Quarterly* in 2002, gives a detailed analysis of Falungong's organizational structure, financing and communications systems.[4] Tong uses extensive primary sources to give a comprehensive introduction of the organizational structure and operations of Falungong. "Framing Dissent in Contemporary China: Irony, Ambiguity and Metonymy" by Patricia Thornton, also carried in the same issue,[5] explores how Falungong uses ironic, ambiguous and metonymic frames to represent adaptive strategies for the articulation of dissenting views in the face of repressive state power. Though Thornton is the first scholar to offer an in-depth critical analysis of Falungong, only part of her article deals with Falungong. The September 2003 issue of *China Quarterly* published "The 'Falungong Problem': Politics and the Struggle for the Rule of Law in China,"[6] which talks about Falungong with reference to Chinese law and policy on "heretical cults" and its link to the ongoing struggle to establish human rights under the rule of law. These articles on Falungong published by *China Quarterly* are well-written and based on extensive research. However, as these articles titles suggest, the publisher does not provide a carefully selected general theme to introduce readers to understand Falungong consistently. *Nova Religio,* a journal of alternative and emergent religions by University of California, published a special issue on Falungong in 2003. Prominent

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[4] James Tong, "An Organizational Analysis of *Falun Gong:* Structure, Communications and Financing," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 636-660.

[5] Patricia Thornton, "Framing Dissent in Contemporary China: Irony, Ambiguity and Metonymy," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 661-681.

[6] Ronald Keith and Zhiqiu Lin, "The 'Falun Gong Problem': Politics and the Struggle for the Rule of Law in China," *China Quarterly* 175 (2003): 623-642.

scholars of religion led by David Ownby wrote about Falungong's history, its comparison to other sectarian religions, its use of Internet, its teachings and so on.[7] Again, the publication of this special issue does not indicate a carefully planned coordination of topical selections for a systematic and broadly analytical introduction to Falungong.

Methodology

This dissertation applies a rhetorical analysis to investigate the traditional roots and the contemporary sociological, cultural, and moral appeals of Falungong. My assumption is that the public discourse through which the Chinese leadership and Falungong communicate with each other and with the broader society constitutes the main medium for their ideological contention. Falungong texts, which include Li Hongzhi's writings and Falungong members' testimonies, while registering alienation and disaffection, become a site of reflection, reframing, dissent, and critique. In contrast, the governmentally approved editorials, which are mainly carried in the *People's Daily,* the official newspaper of the Chinese leadership, not only reflect the negative attitude the leadership has toward Falungong, but also its unchanging political orthodoxy in the face of shifting social reality. In addition, I attempt to demonstrate how traditional values influence and shape the contemporary political behavior of both Falungong and the Chinese leadership. In rhetorical terms, I aim to investigate how the clash between Falungong and Chinese leadership is carried out discursively by finding the political, moral, and cultural values behind their words.

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[7] See, for example, David Ownby, "A History for Falun Gong: Popular Religion and the Chinese State since the Ming Dynasty," *Nova Religio 6* (2003): 661-81.

I will examine a corpus of texts including major writings of Falungong's leader, Li Hongzhi, testimonies of Falungong members, governmental editorials, and documents of the Chinese Communist Party. Li Hongzhi's writings inform us his expansive and complex beliefs and practices. Testimonies of Falungong members reflect their inner thoughts and feelings, providing us with insights into the appeals and strengths of Falungong beliefs through their eyes. Governmental editorials reveal the official attitude the Chinese leadership has toward Falungong. Documents of the Chinese Communist Party offer us glimpses of the mindset of the leadership that we usually will not find in official editorials.

Most of the sources I use in the research are primary sources and in the Chinese language. As a former Chinese diplomat and having studied in the U.S. for more than ten years, I translated the majority of these texts myself to ensure accuracy. In addition, to lend more weight to my argument, I have incorporated recent work on Chinese politics by scholars from Mainland China. These writings reflect the latest changes in China and offer us the views that we do not often hear in the U.S. Furthermore, because of the scant research done on Falungong, I used articles from *Beijing Spring* and *China Spring,* two Chinese language magazines published by Chinese dissidents in the U.S. I mainly use these two journals to locate resources the government censored, such as letters written by Falungong members to the Chinese leadership and world leaders. Finally, I obtained some of the Falungong texts from unofficial distribution channels such as the free newspaper stand in Chinese grocery markets. These resources provide updated and detailed information on daily Falungong activities in China and overseas, which complements the official Chinese and western media reports that focus only on major

events. By citing these unofficial sources in my research, I hope to ensure the preservation of these important source materials.

The present research stresses an interdisciplinary approach synthesizing scholarship from several different fields: history and sociology of religion, political science and cultural ethnographic analysis, and rhetorical criticism and public argument. I attempt to provide a panoramic view of Falungong as a complex social phenomenon by explicating its link to the past, its contemporary appeals, and its challenge to the future political order. In particular, I explore the traditional religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as influences on contemporary political and cultural practices of both the Chinese government and the Falungong movement. My effort is toward baring the interconnectedness between ancient tradition and the contemporary tension between these social actors. I also examine the contemporary conflict between the Chinese leadership and the Falungong movement within the broad context of Chinese political culture, and suggest that contemporary Chinese political culture provides both the backdrop and source of this conflict. I expect my research to increase our understanding of what constitutes the cultural and religious imperatives for the emergence of a contemporary dissident religious movement in China today.

My critical inquiry of Falungong departs from Lloyd Bitzer's model of "Rhetorical Situation," in that it requires accounting for a situation that is overdetermined by competing cultural traditions. A "Rhetorical Situation" can be defined as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relationships" produces an "exigence," which calls for "rhetorical discourse" to "bring about the significant modification of the exigence."[8] My

[8] Lloyd Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader,* ed. John Lucaites et al. (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 220.

study is an attempt to examine larger cultural dynamics that influence the behaviors of social actors in a broadly defined rhetorical situation. As such, the research is much broader in scope than Bitzer's model focusing on one single event. At the same time, Bitzer's model is illuminating. For example, the Chinese experience also has a triggering factor, or to use Bitzer's term, an "exigence." In the instance of Falungong, "exigence" is defined as the woes created by economic reforms, such as the dislocation, disaffection and alienation of a large number of societal members. Such a situation calls forth discourse from both the government and Falnungong. Two general "rhetors" engage in a struggle to sustain a persuasive response to the exigence. When the government fails to produce appropriate and effective discourse, Falungong rises to the task; and the government then responds to undercut the response of Falungong. Hence Bitzer's model needs to be expanded to account for different responses to the situation that are offered competitively by the government and by Falungong, and which bid for the adherence of the audiences who may come under the influence of either rhetorical response. The model also needs to be supplemented by an understanding of countervailing traditions that come to bear in the Chinese "rhetorical situation." In particular, in both the government and Falungong's attempt to influence the audience, they resort to tools that are found in a multi-vocal culture, such as using moral appeals of classical religions or engaging in contrasting interpretations of tradition. Finally, the goal of these rhetors is not short term, in that it aims more for broad social agreement than the immediate change of the mind of an audience.

The Rise of Falungong

Falungong began in 1992 as a semi-religious exercise and meditation program under the guidance of its founder, Li Hongzhi.[9] When it was first founded, it was properly registered and recognized as a government-sanctioned approach to practicing the traditional exercise and breathing regime known as *qigong*. However, in 1996, Li Hongzhi voluntarily removed the organization from the government-approved list and eventually relocated his headquarters to New York City, where he has since acquired permanent resident status. Since Li's departure from China, Falungong members have been anxious to regain official approval of their goals and practices with petitions to the government to permit them to rejoin the list of accepted *qinggong* group. Instead, the government responded by becoming ever more restrictive of the group's activities until it finally declared it illegal on July 22, 1999.

Falungong is one of the largest non-government organizations in the history of People's Republic of China. From the regime's vantage point, Falungong's ability to mobilize collective action to defend its own interest is more threatening than its size, as it claimed that the movement mounted 307 protest demonstrations against the Party and state organizations from 25 April to 22 July 1999.[10] There are many reasons for the immense popularity of Falungong. They include disillusion with the state's authority, complex interpersonal relationships, and an increasingly negative reaction to the entrenchment of modernization. But the most immediate factor for Falungong's strong appeal is the drastic reform of the Chinese economic system since 1978, and the resulting

[9] For more information, see Ownby, "A History for Falun Gong," 223-43; see also Thornton, "Framing Dissent in Contemporary China," 661-81.
[10] Tong, "An Organizational Analysis of the Falun Gong," 636.

massive lay-off of blue-collar workers from state-owned enterprises (*xiagang gongren*). Falungong's therapeutic role meets the dire needs of this mass of newborn marginals.

Statistics provided by Chinese economists confirm the high unemployment in China in the late 1990s. He Qinglian, author of the controversial book, *The Pitfall of Modernization,* reveals that the poverty-stricken population, whose monthly income is below 103 RMB (14 USD), reached 15 million at the end of 1995.[11] By the late 1990s, Hu Angang, a Chinese economist, estimated that the unemployment figure was about 46 million.[12] Migrant farmers, as a result of the economic reform, lost their land to industrialization; they enter into the city to work in mining, construction, and the service industry. They are usually underpaid and do not enjoy any benefits.[13] Furthermore, by 1998, the elderly population of over 65 has reached 7.4% of the entire population. By the mid twenty-first century, the elderly in China will account for half of the population in all Asia over 65, and 1/5 over 65 population of the entire world.[14] To worsen these problems, in the countryside, there are about one hundred million peasants whose monthly income is below 180 *yuan*, the Chinese standard of poverty line.[15]

The government has failed to provide an adequate social-safety net, and the unemployed are left on the verge of not being able to maintain subsistence.[16] For

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[11] He Qinglian, *Xiandaihua de xianjing* [The Pitfall of Modernization] (Beijing: China Today Publishing House, 1993), 222.

[12] For example, according to He Qinglian, in 1993, the "basic living allowance" for poverty-stricken urban residents is 35.7 *yuan. The Pitfall of Modernization,* 224. Dorothy Solinger provided more recent figures on the government's living allowance for laid off workers. For example, in 2000, the standard payment for an unemployed worker in Wuhan was 280 *yuan* per month. For details, see Dorothy Solinger, "Labor Market Reform and the Plight of the Laid-off Proletariat," *China Quarterly* 170 (2002), 317.

[13] Tian Hua, "Lun dangdai shehui fenhuazhong de xinsheng ruishi qunti" [On the New Socially Vulnerable Group in the Current Social Stratification], *Academic Exploration,* no. 5 (2001): 52-55.

[14] Hu Chengpeng, "Ruoshi qunti – zhongguo muqian juxu jiejue de wenti"[Socially Vulnerable Group – A Urgent Issue that Needs to be Solved Right Way in China], *Journal of Harbin Party School of the CCP,* no. 4 (2002): 51-52.

[15] Ibid., 51.

[16] Solinger, "Labor Market Reform," 304 n. 4.

example, Dorothy J. Solinger interviewed laid off workers in China. In Wuhan, the official "basic living allowance" for the laid off workers was 280 *yuan* per month as of autumn of 2000, "itself hardly enough for eking out an existence," she noted. Even worse, of the some 50 laid-off workers she talked to, hardly anyone was receiving the full amount due.[17] As the rate of unemployed Chinese is growing at an alarming pace, China has a large *ruoshi qiuti* (socially disadvantaged group) that is bringing overwhelming pressure to Chinese economic life, politics, ethics and the social order.[18]

The appearance of the so-called *ruoshi qunti* seriously challenges the economic development or even the stability of China. But what is the response of the government? Wang Sibin, a Chinese sociologist, uses the terms "Individual Responsibility" to characterize the government's attitude toward this group. "As the theorist of individual responsibility argues, the fact that these people have become members of the socially disadvantaged is caused by personal reasons. The unasked question is: 'why have not other people fallen into the same forlorn situation.'"[19] By contrast, the advocates of the "Social Responsibility," a minority in China, insists that society is responsible for the existence of socially vulnerable groups. That these people have become socially disadvantaged has been triggered by social transformation and the system of distribution. In other words, it is because the official policy favors the strong over the weak that these people have become marginalized.[20] The Chinese government has not been willing to shoulder the responsibility for the occurrence of *ruoshi qunti* in China. Instead, they put

[17] Ibid., 317.

[18] Wang Sibin, "Shehui zhuanxinzhong de ruoshi qunti"[On Socially Vulnerable Groups], *China Cadres Tribune,* no. 3 (2002): 4-7.

[19] Wang Sibin, "Ruoshi qunti shengcun zhuangkuang de gaishan yu shehui zhengce de tiaozheng,"[To Improve the Living Condition of the Socially Vulnerable Group and to Adjust Social Policies], *China Cadres Tribune,* no. 4 (2002): 1-3.

[20] Ibid., 2.

the responsibility squarely on individual social members. For example, as an editorial in *People's Daily* argues, "in the modernization process, it is inevitable that certain number of people cannot survive the fierce competition."[21]

Under such extreme circumstances, the members of the socially disadvantaged group suffer a strong sense of deprivation and frustration. Psychologically, they feel dissatisfied, anxious, pessimistic, and helpless. They have a difficult time accepting the reality; it is even harder for them to make self-adjustments. According to a research report on laid off female workers in Chengdu City in northwestern China conducted by Sichuan University in 2001, " being laid off *(xiagang)* not only causes a dramatic decrease in their income, it also produces in these female workers a strong sense of deprivation and self-worth. It deals a heavy psychological blow to them. A series of health and mental problems began to surface: depression, anxiety, isolation, difficulty in breathing, heart disease and hypertension."[22] According to the same report, 65% of these laid-off female workers felt victimized by the economic reforms, 57.7% thought the government inefficient in helping them find a new job, 58% thought that the government was responsible for their reemployment, and 44% did not have faith in their future.[23]

At this critical juncture, a large number of *ruoshi qunti* turned to Falungong for solace and support, as the majority of Falungong members consist of those of the socially disadvantaged. According to a research report on Falungong by Academy of Sciences in China, "the majority of Falungong members are 'the middle aged, the elderly, women,

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[21] "Falu bixu zhangsheng xieer,"*People's Daily,* Dec. 22, 1999, overseas edition.
[22] Chen Zhangping, ed.,*Fazhan de Chuangshan: Chengdushi xiagang nugong xianzhuang baogao* [The Wound of the Development: A Report on the Livelihood of the Laid-off Female Worker from Chengdu City] (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, 2001), 133.
[23] Ibid., 132.

the sick and the socially marginalized.'"[24] As Lisa Weaver, a CNN news producer/respondent in Beijing, confirms, Falungong had been most popular in northeast China, where Chinese heavy industry is concentrated, and a large number of Chinese blue-collar workers had been laid off.[25]

The initial function of Falungong is to help its members cope with the distress they experience. Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falungong, claims that by following his beliefs, one can purify one's body, be rid of sickness and reach spiritual attainment. The majority of Falungong believers perceive the practice of Falungong as directly contributing to the improvement of their health. The following testimony, given by Wang Youqun in his "Ten-Thousand-Character Open Letter to Jiang Zemin," explains the primary reason why he joined Falungong:

> I began to practice Falungong in 1995. Within a few days, Master Li helped me purify my body thoroughly. For the past four years, I did not spend one single cent on medical expenses... A great many terminally ill patients who have been declared incurable by modern medicine have become healthy again after they start to practice Falungong. Hundreds of thousands of people, after believing in Falungong, have stopped using doctors and medicine.[26]

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[24] Psychological Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Science, ed., *Falungong xianxiang de xinlixue fenxi* [A Psychological Analysis of the "Falungong" Phenomenon] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2002), 1.

[25] Conversation with Lisa Weaver, Pittsburgh, Feb. 22, 2000.

[26] Wang Youqun,"Guanyu falungong de yifengxin"[A Letter on Falungong], *Beijing Spring* 77 (1999): 25.

Indeed, most of the Falungong members cite "health reasons" as the primary factor for joining the group. The claim that Falungong restores their health is evident in almost all the testimonies of Falungong members. Quantitative surveys also support this claim. For example, according to a survey conducted by the Psychological Research Institute of Chinese Academia Sinica, 43.58% of Falungong members list "strengthening health and being rid of sickness" as the main reason for them to join the group.[27] The testimony and empirical data cited here, in a qualitative way, provide evidence that Falungong offers healing to the common Chinese and helps them relieve discomfort.

But Falungong is not defined simply by its therapeutic practices. It is has a distinctive metaphysical foundation that runs counter to official government doctrine. Li Hongzhi, Falungong's leader, believes the fall of the humankind from divine origins creates the need for it to reach spiritual transcendence to a higher level through cultivation. According to him, the "universe" is the highest order of cosmology and is fundamentally moral in character. There is "Fa" (law) in this universe because the universe is constrained by reason (li). The Fa is comprised of *zhen, shan,* and *ren* (truth, benevolence, and forbearance), which are at once the nature, composition, and characteristics of the universe, as well as the source of all other moral virtues.[28]

Being the creation of gods, human beings can trace their origins to the highest level of the universe, where they begin as moral beings. But when some begin to deviate from the cosmic qualities by becoming selfish and bad, they fall to a lower level.[29] Human beings are thus in a maze because of the Fall and must practice cultivation so that

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[27] Psychological Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Science, *Falungong,* 67.
[28] Maria Hsia Chang, *Falun Gong: The End of Days* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004),72.
[29] Ibid., 67.

they can "return to [their] true selves" (*fanben guizhen*).[30] Practitioners ascend to higher planes when they accumulate *de* (virtue), and get rid of *yeli* (karma).

As practitioners rise to higher levels of the universe, they become increasingly assimilated to the cosmos and will develop "supernormal abilities." These supernormal abilities include the opening of "celestial eye," not getting wet in the rain, the "celestial ear," psychokinesis, teleportation, "psychic travel," "transmigration," "fixing power," levitation, and *summing tong.* Li Hongzhi gives an explanation of the "celestial eyes": "That eye, is 'located slightly above and between one's eyebrows" and is connected to the pineal gland. The eye's initial opening is described by Li as follows: 'People usually practice…at midnight when the night is dark and quiet. As one practices, he will suddenly see a larger eye before his eyes… That large unblinking eye is looking, and it is vivid clear. Accordingly, some people call it the demon's eye… others call it the Buddha's eye, etc. In fact, it is your own eye."[31] Li Hongzhi further explains these terms: "Transmigration is the ability of a practitioner to 'suddenly disappear, and then all of a sudden emerge somewhere else.' This is because the highly cultivated body, being 'composed of extremely fine grains,' 'can go through spaces.' A practitioner with 'fixing power' has the ability, upon seeing 'an evildoer running away,' to 'just say fix and he will be fixed on the spot.' Levitation ('Flying in the air') is supernormal ability that is developed 'once the great heavenly circuit is opened up.' As for *summing tong,* that is the ability to tell the past and future of another person."[32] As Li Hongzhi believes, Falungong members acquire these supernormal abilities when they ascend to higher

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[30] Ibid., 80.
[31] Chang, *Falungong,* 83.
[32] Ibid., 83-4.

planes. The daily *qinggong* exercises Falungong members practice are believed to be concrete steps to spiritual ascendance.

However, the reason for the immense popularity of Falungong is more complex and profound than its immediate therapeutic effect or its metaphysical peculiarities. As this research will show, Falungong's teachings, shaped by the traditions of Buddhism and Taoism, instill idealism in members. Members are taught to link their personal fate with the betterment of the larger society. They develop a strong sense of moral purpose to engage in actions that will bring changes to society. They are thus liberated from the role of victim of the social system and instead become agents of change.

Why is Falungong a Threat to the Chinese Government?

For much of the world, awareness of Falungong first came in 1999, when the Chinese government banned it, arresting and jailing members. Falungong practice stations were ransacked and shut down. These events reflected systematic efforts by the Chinese leadership to suppress Falungong. The West would learn that the central government set up an office to oversee the crackdown on June 10, 1999. It is known as the "610 Office" in reference to that date.

Beyond the physical suppression, the Chinese government launched a nationwide ideological campaign to ensure that the Chinese people continued to pledge their allegiance to the central government. *People's Daily,* the official propaganda organ of the central government, carried daily editorials to denounce Falungong in 1999. Headlines of the editorials included "Cancer of the Society, Curse of the People,"

"Falungong is Really a Cult," and "Ludicrous Heresy and Evil Intent."[33] Through these measures, the Chinese government, in effect, declared Falungong an open enemy of the state.

Why does the Chinese government deem Falungong the enemy of the state? Why does the Chinese government perceive it as a threat? Falungong does not promote a political agenda that challenges the Chinese government. It stated instead that its goal is to strengthen the mind and body of its followers. It is a threat, nonetheless, because its members engage in behaviors such as being loyal to a spiritual leader who is not a communist party member, pursuing an alternative ideology, and reactivating traditional and cultural strains that are at odds with the communist tradition. As the core of communist ideology is not to tolerate any non-compliance, it is not surprising that the Chinese government would perceive Falungong as a threat.

Falungong may be especially threatening because its dissent comes from subtle and complex moral, cultural, sociological, and medical anthropological roots. Falungong came to stand for the alternative use of the body, a somatic-turned-critical discourse, the engagement of non-compliant collective actions, and promotion of a religious faith that challenges the ideological foundations of the Chinese Communist Party with its Marxist materialism, authoritarianism, and scientism. Let us examine each in turn.

Free Spaces

The first step in Falungong members' dissent is their claim that their body belongs to themselves, free from interference of the state. This claim is noteworthy

[33] "Falungong Is Really a Cult," *People's Daily,* Oct. 28, 1999, overseas edition; "Cancer of the Society and Curse of the People," *People's Daily,* Aug. 20, 1999, overseas edition; "Ludicrous Heresy and Evil Intent," *People's Daily,* Aug. 18, 1999, overseas edition.

because it implies that ordinary Chinese should have a private space of their own, a challenge to the government's control of their mind and body. In this sense, Falungong is advocating what social scientists in the West call "free spaces"[34] or "small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization." Related terms are "protected spaces," "safe spaces," "spatial preserves," "havens," "sequestered social sites," "cultural laboratories," "spheres of cultural autonomy," and "free social spaces."[35] As these terms indicate, "free spaces" are both sociological and political. They are sociological because they offer a sanctuary for the powerless to redress their suffering and to get relief from the oppressive rule of the hegemonic group. Yet, they are also political, because their creation can provide cathartic moments when collective identities are often forged and political agendas are established.

The term "free spaces" is quite relevant to Falungong's practice. Self-cultivation and self-nurturing of the body enable Falungong members to relieve their somatic pain, to engage in spiritual growth and to empower themselves. In a social system that emphasizes the interest of the state, and where attention to the welfare of the individual is discouraged, the existence of such a private space is essential for many Falungong members to rejuvenate themselves in order to deal with the harsh reality brought on by the recent social and economic upheavals. In this context, the very action of carving out individual spaces amounts to transgressing state sanctioned behaviors. Originally created to evade the repressive hand of the state, these individual spaces

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[34] Sara Evans first used the term in her book, *Personal Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
[35] Francesca Polletta, " 'Free Spaces' in Collective Action," *Theory and Society* 28 (1999): 1-2.

become "dissenting pockets" for Falungong members to develop a new alternative consciousness to challenge the moral and social norms of the Chinese government.

Somatic-Turned-Critical Discourse

The emphasis on the human body is important in this process.[36] "The deployment of the body as a frame for dissent is particularly compelling in the Chinese context in part because of the prevalence of 'somatization'-- the expression of personal and social distress in an idiom of bodily complaints and medical help seeking," Patricia Thornton argues. A common theme found in testimonies of Falungong members is how they fall ill and suffer from bodily pains, and how they hope to find therapy and consolation somewhere. These sentiments or emotions, are social because they are linking "the individual body, the social body, and body politic," observe Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock.[37] In their study of individuals suffering from depression in Hunan, Joan Kleinman and Arthur Kleinman discovered unusually high levels of somatized complaints associated with social stress brought on by large-scale political, economic, and institutional change among Chinese patients. Inordinate numbers of patients presented physical complaints in the absence of defined organic pathology, primarily headaches, dizziness and insomnia. As they note, in the Chinese context, "depression signifies potentially dangerous political implications: disaffiliation, alienation and potential opposition. Here, as a complementary process to disease

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[36] See, for example, Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborges, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[37] Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly,* no. 1 (1987): 6-41.

causation, we have the cultural construction of illness."[38] The Kleinmans point out an organic and bilateral link between the cause of the bodily pain of an individual social member and the role of the body politic. The body politic is seen as being responsible for producing the dysphoria – an emotional state of anxiety, depression, and restlessness. The patient's somatic discourse can be regarded as an ultimate protest to the body politic.

Recent research by Nancy Chen supports the Kleinmans's argument on the critical role of somatic discourse. She connects it with the qigong practice[39] of which Falungong has originated. She proposes the term "breathing spaces" to refer to " the literal experience of breath work and production of spaces in all possible senses – phenomenological, social and spatial that emerged in qigong practices. By breathing deeply and slowly, experiences of public spaces and urban sites could become infused with personal meaning and cosmological order rather than remaining solely official."[40] The term "breathing spaces" is meant to be critical of an illiberal society, as the only private space belonging to an individual is his/her breathing room. Yet, such spaces, according to Nancy Chen, can become a site of resistance, as they can be both empowering and socially disruptive. "[Healing] practices that nurture self-cultivation," may "not only promote breathing room apart from institutional time and space but even have the potential to undo official agendas."[41]

The somatic discourse of Falungong members thus becomes a form of social critique. Falungong members are able to reframe their somatic experience, and rise above

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[38] Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "Somatization: The Interconnections in Chinese Society among Culture, Depressive Experiences and the Meanings of Pain," *Culture and Depression,* ed. Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 468-69.

[39] For a detailed discussion of qigong practice in China, see Jian Xu, "Body, Discourse, and the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Chinese Qigong," *Journal of Asian Studies* 58 (1999): 961-91.

[40] Nancy Chen, *Breathing Spaces: Qigong, Psychiatry, and Healing in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xi.

[41] Ibid., 16.

their personal circumstances to become the critics of the Chinese body politic. As testimonies of Falungong members show, physical recuperation is often followed by mental reflections that connect physical discomfort with larger societal issues. Falungong members dislodge and negotiate their previous ideological beliefs, before constructing their own interpretations of how to transform and build an idealized Chinese society. Thus, they see themselves as agents of change responsible for restoring a sense of ideological coherence and moral rectitude. These actions take on moral significance, as Thornton suggests, "Falungong texts offer a morally charged analysis of contemporary Chinese society that implicates the current regime for the failings of the official order."[42]

Collective Action

Falungong claims that it does not have a political agenda and will never engage in activities to sabotage the Chinese government. Li Hongzhi said in "My Statement" issued on July 22, 1999 that he would never oppose the central government at present or in the future.[43] Indeed, Falungong members have engaged in peaceful actions. They see the government as their own. For example, after the Chinese leadership declared Falungong a cult and banned its practice, Falungong members sent petitions to the Chinese leaders, government offices, and world leaders to express their bafflement and frustration, and ask for reinstatement. In an open letter to UN Secretary Koffi Annan, Falungong members said: "As citizens, and law-abiding citizens, in our own beloved

[42] Thornton, "Framing Dissent," 674.

[43] "Li Hongzhi fabiao 'wo de yidian shengming': xianzai he jianglai dou buhui fandui zhengfu" [Li Hongzhi issued "My Statement:" I will not oppose the government now or ever], *World Journal,* July 23, 1999.

country, we are suddenly accused of enemies by a government we trust, we feel truly regretful."[44]

Yet, Falungong promotes incipiently political collective actions. As sociologist Xueguang Zhou suggests,

> Clearly, collective action in the Chinese context manifests itself not only through open resistance and demonstration, but also in more subtle forms of non-compliant behavior that fall outside the conventional scope of collective action. Unlike other social contexts, however, in China these forms of resistance share the characteristics of collective action. In a sense, collective inaction is an invisible 'sit-in' in the Chinese political context. Its message is loud and clear, even without symbolic actions.[45]

Thornton sees this type of action as strategic. These actions "operate in the public sphere in full view of the authorities, but at the boundaries of what is politically permissible in repressive regimes." For Thornton, these subtle transgressions carry "a carefully encoded subversive message," which can "succeed in nibbling away at the boundaries of hegemonic state control."[46]

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[44] "An Open Letter to UN Secretary General Annan," *China Spring* 194 (1999): 63-4.
[45] Zhou Xueguang, "Unorganized Interests and Collective Action in Communist China," *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993), 67.
[46] Ibid.

Falungong's Critique of Materialism, Authoritarianism, and Scientism

Falungong promotes humanism by making the welfare of human beings its ultimate concern. It is antithetical to the ideological foundation of the Communist leadership. Since 1949, the communist leadership has upheld the cultural practice of subordinating the interest and well being of individuals to the cause of the government. In contrast, Falungong advocates the achievement of individual physical health and spiritual fulfillment. It thus forms a critique of the communist practice.

The premise of authoritarianism in China is that ordinary people need ongoing ideological transformation throughout their entire life, whereas Falungong endorses the belief that humans are suffering moral degradation, but humans are capable of transforming themselves spiritually through self-efforts. A typical way for a Falungong practitioner to become moral again is to performing *qigong* exercises, which will improve his/her *xingxing* (mind nature) and moral quality. In the process, the bad karma within an individual is turned into *de* (virtue).[47] A society can become better if all citizens engage in moral behavior. Falungong thus challenges the need for authoritarian practices.

Falungong also implicitly challenges the practice of scientism by the Chinese leadership. Scientism refers to an attitude which views science as a cultural principle capable of solving all problems in the realm of human affairs. Since the economic reform, the Chinese leadership has upheld an attitude of scientism. It views science as being capable of transforming all spheres of the Chinese society. Falungong offers an indirect critique of the value of scientism. Its aims to find an alternative method to solve problems in the human world by employing a non-empirical method to explain social and

[47] Chang, *Falungong*, 81.

natural phenomenon to which science cannot provide answers. Its professed concern is the welfare of ordinary people. It foregrounds humanity in its ideology and practices.[48]

The Rhetorical Strategies of Falungong

The Chinese leadership has been suppressing Falungong in a physical manner in mainland China with the help of state machinery and media. As a result, the Falungong movement had to go underground. Li Hongzhi went into exile in the U.S. The movement now is forced to continue its spiritual practice and its struggle for justice overseas, mainly in the U.S and Western Europe. Yet, in spite of this, it is the Falungong movement rather than the Chinese leadership who seems to be winning a symbolic victory in the court of public opinion, especially on an international scale. World leaders uniformly condemn the Chinese leadership for its violation of human rights. International media regularly report the activities of Falungong in a positive light. A large number of ordinary citizens in the west holds sympathetic attitude toward Falungong. Here, it is fair to say that the attention and support Falungong receives from international community are largely due to a series of rhetorical strategies Falungong employs.

Before the crackdown, Falungong adopted different kinds of rhetorical strategies to demonstrate its strength. For example, the number "ten thousand" (*wan*) in China indicates a significant amount. As such, Falungong members held demonstrations in the number of ten thousand people (*wan ren*). When Falungong members appealed to the

[48] For more discussions on scientism, see Casper Hakfoort, "The Historiography of Scientism: A Critical Review," *History of Science* 33 (1995): 375-95; see also D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought: 1900-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

central leadership for reinstatement, they sent "ten thousand character letter" (*wan yan shu*). The symbolism of dates and locations is also important. Falungong carried out demonstrations in dates such as the Chinese New Year, June 4th (the anniversary date of the governmental suppression of student movement in Tiananmen Square), July 22 (the anniversary date when Chinese government banned Falungong), and National Day to attract media attention.[49] Falungong is also careful in picking the location where they stage events. They held their first large-scale sit-in in front of Zhongnanhai, the headquarters of the Chinese government. Later activities were regularly scheduled in Tiananmen Square, which Chinese and western tourists and foreign journalists frequent.

After the crackdown, Falungong adjusted its rhetorical strategies to concentrate on winning sympathy and support of the international community. As a popular movement without the control of media, its struggle with the Chinese leadership is mainly fought in the court of public opinion. Falungong sends petitions to international leaders such as UN secretary general Koffi Annan to appeal for justice. Its members deliberately get arrested in a highly visible manner. For example, when Chinese state leaders visited Western Europe, Falungong members wore yellow coats to participate in demonstrations to protest the visit of Chinese leaders. Their arrest was highly publicized by international media. Falungong also makes creative use of media. As it does not control media, Falungong amends this disadvantage by constantly seeking the attention of media. In other words, it attempts to stay perennially in the spotlight of media attention. For example, getting arrested in highly visible manner, bringing Chinese leadership

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[49] According to a *New York Times* news story, Falungong members protested in Tiananmen Square in an attempt to commemorate the second anniversary of a silent sit-in that the movement held outside the leadership compound in 1999. Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Falun Gong Holds Protests on Anniversary of Big Sit-In," *New York Times,* sec. A, April 26, 2001.

repeatedly to international courts, holding demonstrations and events on special dates and locations, all reveal its attempt to become the object of "hard news" of media focus.[50] This is where we note that the rhetorical strategy of Falungong is deliberate and carefully planned. Falungong members are aware that their action, in practical terms, will not produce "concrete" results, i.e. bringing about their reinstatement. But they are more interested in exerting the symbolic strength of its beliefs and practices.

Many Falungong rhetorical devices are aimed for emblematic effects. For example, as a dissident movement against an authoritarian regime, getting arrested by the police suggests symbolically a violation of human rights. Another example of symbolic action is their law suits against Chinese leaders in international courts.[51] Here, the verdict of the legal judgment is much less important than the process of bringing the "guilty" party to justice. For the suppressed Falungong members, the process itself is empowering. Though the Chinese leadership may have the "real" state power, in symbolic terms, they are on equals footing with Falungong in front of law. In the same manner, though the court may not be able to decide in their favor, the very action of bringing the Chinese leaders to justice suggests symbolically Falungong's moral superiority.

Through such thoughtful use of rhetorical strategies, Falungong has secured a place in the world annals of a weak popular religious movement fighting against the injustice of a mighty repressive regime. Though it may have been physically suppressed

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[50] Between July 21, 1999 and January 29 2004, *New York Times* carried one hundred and twenty-six news stories on Falungong, according to a search on LexisNexis, an online database.

[51] For example, Falungong practitioners sued Sun Jiazheng, the Chinese Culture Minister in a Paris court for being responsible for torturing Falungong members in China when he visited France. Craig Smith, "Sect Sues Minister," *New York Times,* sec. A, January 29, 2004.

in mainland China, Falungong's influence lives on. Its use of rhetorical strategies has contributed to achieving this goal.

Communications and Mobilization System

Falungong employs an efficient communication system through which Falungong's Beijing headquarters could send message through intermediate levels to practice sites. Routine communications were sent through the postal system, more time-sensitive messages were delivered via telegram, telephone, and facsimile, while written notes, word-of-mouth messages, cellular phones, and pagers were also used. The Internet was a recent acquisition, through which confidential messages were sometimes encrypted, and it was used extensively especially after the Beijing Siege of April 25, 1999, when Li Hongzhi would post his communications on the web from his New York office.[52]

Of the four main stations (Wuhan, Fuzhou, Shanghai, and Changchun) on which the internal organizational structure and functions were formed, Wuhan had an external liaison (*duwai lianluo*) committee, Fuzhou had a liaison committee, Shanghai had a propaganda (*xuanchuan*) committee, and Changchun had an information and material (*xuexi cailiao*) division to establish a network of information among guidance stations and a general office (*bangongshi*) to disseminate communications from the Beijing *Falun Dafa* Research Society.[53] There was an institutionalized transmission process, where directives from and reports to the Beijing *Falun Dafa* Research Society were sent

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[52] Tong, "An Organizational Analysis of the *Falun Gong*," 647.
[53] Ibid., 649.

sequentially through the hierarchical ladder, from the main station, to county stations, practice sites, study groups and finally to individuals.[54]

Three types of documents were disseminated from the Beijing headquarters to lower levels. "Scriptures" (*jingwen*) were instructions and pronouncements of Li Hongzhi; "documents" (*wenjian*) were business correspondence from the Beijing *Falun Dafa* Research Society;[55] while books on meditation exercises and Dharma philosophy constituted the third set of communications.[56]

The Politics of the Chinese Leadership

It is hard to understand the intricacies of the Falungong movement in relation to Chinese politics without learning the mindset of Chinese leadership. In the face of increasingly dynamic and fluid social reality, the Chinese leadership has resisted any political reform resulting from market reforms. The leadership feels it is possible to cling to its old political mentality inherited from the revolutionary Maoist era while continuing to enforce the economic reform. The long-established political reflex lingers on when the government renews its efforts to control the body and mind of the Chinese people. This creates a sharp conflict between the leadership and the people when the Chinese are increasingly clamoring for freedom of consciousness. Here, Falungong presents a good case study to demonstrate how the Chinese people are struggling for autonomy and contending against the tight control of the government over their bodies and minds.

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[54] Ibid., 649.

[55] "The *Falun Gong* Research Society" (*Falun Gong yanjiuhui*) was the official name that Li Hongzhi applied for accreditation. It was the headquarters of Falungong in Beijing.

[56] Tong, "An Organizational Analysis," 648.

Many Chinese will remember the Chinese President Jiang Zemin's speech on July 1, 2001 to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. In this speech, Jiang announced that the Chinese Communist Party would henceforth allow capitalists to join the Party. This move is considered monumental because until now the Chinese Communist Party had claimed itself to be a proletarian party, as the majority of its members are peasants, workers and soldiers. Capitalists had long been regarded as the enemy of the Communist Party. Jiang's gesture is seen as a move of the Communist party towards more liberalization, and towards becoming a party of coalition with other social groups.

Jiang's action confirms the views of many Chinese Studies scholars that China in twenty-first century has become an increasingly pluralistic society.[57] Andrew Nathan, a renowned Chinese Studies Scholar, characterizes contemporary China as a land of heterogeneity. He gives an example of heterogeneity by noting that the Chinese now have the option to commonly participate in debates, choices, dilemmas and disagreements with a multitude of mindsets.[58] The President Jiang himself has also provided evidence of the continuous positive changes in the Chinese society. In his speech on July 1, 2001, he says:

> Since the economic reforms, new changes have taken place in the formation of class structures of our country. There have appeared founders and technical personnel of non-governmental business enterprises; managerial and technical

[57] Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: the Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.
[58] Andrew J. Nathan,. "Foreword," *Chinese Political Culture: 1989-2000,* ed. Shiping Hua and Joseph Smith (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), xi-xii.

> personnel employed by foreign enterprises, self-employed entrepreneurs, and private business owners, middlemen, and people who do free-lancing. In addition, many people change jobs between different systems of ownerships, different trades and professions, and different regions.[59]

Jiang's remarks point out a tremendous change in Chinese society: before the economic reforms, Chinese stayed in one job until they retired. The economic reforms have introduced a complex economic system for creating new occupations that enables the Chinese to switch jobs easily. However, the evidence of pluralization cited by Jiang reflects only one aspect of China's change, and, characteristically, is of a non-political nature. Changes of a more political nature have also occurred. They include a weaker party-state, the appearance of many unofficial associations, and above all, the awakening of a more politically conscious Chinese people, represented, to cite an example, by Falungong.[60]

With the changes have come increasing complexity and contradictions. While the Chinese leadership continues to initiate more economic reforms, they have resisted any attempts to introduce major changes in the Communist political system. Thus, the political stagnation the Chinese leadership prefers and the challenges that economic reform poses to the Chinese society have made changes in China uneven and inconsistent. Many Chinese experience their current condition as perplexing. Borge Bakken, author of *Exemplary Society*, comments on the contradictions: "the quest for

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[59] Jiang Zemin, "Speech to Commemorate the Founding of Eighty Years of Chinese Communist Party," *People's Daily,* July 1, 2001, 1, overseas edition.

[60] For further readings, see, for example, Brian Hook, ed., *Individual and the State in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen, eds., *China beyond the Headlines* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

both more and less control, both purity of behavior and freedom to choose one's behavior, characterize the emotions of today's Chinese standing on the threshold between tradition and modernity."[61] Echoing the same sentiment but presenting the problem from a slightly different angle, Chinese Studies scholars Merle Goldman and Roderick Macquhar appropriately term the contradictions in Chinese reforms "a paradox of the post-Mao era." As they say: "the paradox of the post Mao era is that an expanding dynamic economy has undermined the authority of the political leaders. Despite some limited political and legal reforms, there is an increasing dichotomy between Chinese economic growth and its increasingly fragile party-state. There is also a dichotomy between the leadership's outdated and unheeded emphasis on centralized control and social conformity and its increasing social pluralism."[62] Yet, despite Chinese leadership's attempts to resist political reform, economic reforms are spilling over into the political arena and producing unintended consequences. This struggle for administrative control by the Chinese leadership and the erosion of control by the Chinese society that make the politics of contemporary China an intriguing object of study for rhetorical scholars.

Evidence supports the observations of Chinese Studies scholars that China is filled with paradoxes and contradictions. For instance, while capitalists can now join the Communist Party, and the village-level democratic elections have been going on for years since the reform, the government has initiated further crackdowns on publishing

[61] Borge Bakken, *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control, and the Dangers of Modernity in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.
[62] Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, eds., *Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 16.

houses and jailing of editors.[63] Examples like this demonstrate the complex terrain of Chinese politics and the mounting tension among different social forces to initiate or restrain political changes. The efforts of the Chinese leadership to initiate nominal structural changes while attempting to control the minds of the Chinese people constitute one of the main areas of tension. For the Chinese leadership, it remains true that "improving the 'human quality' (*ren de suzhi*) becomes a core element in attempts to control the Juggernaut [of modernization]."[64] The Chinese people are resisting the rule of conformity and are beginning to break out of the mode of submissiveness and docility and clamor for freedom of consciousness.

In recent years, the Chinese leadership has been increasingly using performance legitimacy to legitimate their right to rule.[65] As renowned Chinese Studies scholar Joseph Fewsmith notes, "Although the Party still claims legitimacy on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and this claim has important consequences for the political system, everyone is aware that performance legitimacy has become far more important than ideology in justifying the government's continued rule."[66] In other words, the Chinese

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[63] Joseph Fewsmith gives more details on the crackdown of the Chinese publishing industry. In an unpublished speech in January [of 2001), Jiang Zemin declared: 'I do not believe that our Party cannot manage well book numbers." A meeting of publishing heads in March disseminated Jiang's remarks and further cracked down on publishing. Publishing had faced numerous political difficulties since the embassy bombing the previous year, but now another 15-20 houses were suspended, reorganized, or closed. Some editors were jailed. *China since Tiananmen,* 227.

[64] Bakken, *Exemplary Society*, 5.

[65] The term of "performance legitimacy" was first proposed by political scientist Samuel Huntington in his work, *The Third Wave, Democratization of the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 258-9. He used the term "performance legitimacy" to contrast with "procedural legitimacy." Citing him, X.L. Ding's remarks illuminate the importance of the two concepts: "Huntington points out that 'performance legitimacy plays a role in democratic regimes, but ... it is secondary to procedural legitimacy.' If a democratic system experiences legitimacy, it can renew itself through the process of election. In contrast, 'the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes (including the communist regimes) came to rest almost entirely on performance.' Often they fail to deliver they have promised, for example, a high rate of economic growth, there exist no mechanisms of self-renewal for these regimes, and they will face the total erosion of their legitimacy," *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994),125.

[66] Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen,* 9.

leadership has changed from their former practice of basing their legitimacy solely on Marxist-Maoist principles to the present practice of deriving their legitimacy through a claim of superior performance.

The claim of performance legitimacy is abundant in the rhetoric of the Chinese leadership. If one reads speeches of the Chinese leadership on major occasions, the beginning of the speech invariably claims achievements made possible under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. For example, in Jiang Zemin's speech on July 1, 2001, the Chinese leadership took credit in the "speedy social and economic development, the daily prosperity of the nation, and the rising of the social status of the Chinese people, material living standard, and cultural and educational level."[67] Jiang comes to the conclusion: "Without the Chinese Communist Party, there is no new China. When there is the Chinese Communist Party, China takes on a new look. This is the conclusion drawn by the Chinese people from the past long experiences and struggle."[68] Jiang's line of argument suggests a powerful rhetorical strategy the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has been using since 1949, but has intensified in the era of market reform, while emphasizing the government's performance over its ideological purity. The assumptions that the leadership of the Chinese government is indispensable have become the major premise in all the propaganda of the Chinese leadership.

The Chinese leadership's claim to performance legitimacy is reflected in the recent proposition of the well-known slogans of the "Three Representatives," the new political guidelines of the Chinese leadership in the twenty-first century. The three interests to be represented by the Chinese Communist Party are the development of the

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[67] Jiang Zemin, "Speech to Commemorate the Founding ," 1.
[68] Ibid.

advanced social productive forces, the most advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the broad masses of the Chinese people. The Chinese leadership perceives that its performance legitimacy has earned itself the right to represent the Chinese people, which implies the moral superiority of the leadership.[69] In the view of the Chinese leadership, the Chinese people can only become "good" citizens under the guidance of the leadership. To them, a "good" citizen means he/she is trusting, obedient, and conforming.

The goal of the Chinese communist leadership is not only to adapt the Chinese people to communist ideology, but also to control the direction of modernization. Jiang Zemin's speech at the celebration of the founding of eighty years of the Chinese Communist Party gives us insight into the model of modernization the Chinese leadership envisions. As Jiang says: "When we build all the causes of socialism with Chinese characteristics, we should put emphasis not only on raising the material living standard of

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[69] The Chinese leadership's claim to moral superiority has deep historical roots, as Chinese emperors have claimed to be the sons of Heaven, and have received a Mandate from Heaven to rule. Traditionally, the Chinese believe in the overwhelming power of Heaven and its forces. As the late renowned sociologist C. K. Yang writes, "There was no more readily observable symbol of supremacy above man than the mysterious, limitless heights of Heaven. The regular movements of the heavenly bodies symbolized Heaven's regulative power to keep the universe in stable order… Any individual or group that succeeded in convincing the people that they were the earthly representatives of such forces would enjoy in the public mind Heaven's sanction and would share Heaven's superhuman power." The underlying assumption is that leaders have an innate moral superiority and their authority should never be challenged. The Confucian principle of government by men of merit through selection was the basis for the authority of the administrative officials, but officials are believed to possess sagacity, unusual abilities, and perfect virtues. C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 129-30.

The traditional beliefs of rule by the Mandate of Heaven and Confucian orthodoxy did not end in 1949. In its leadership style, the Communist Party has used a rhetoric of an innate moral superiority heavily influenced by traditional imperial practices and Confucian orthodoxy. The moral superiority the Chinese leadership feels about itself is best reflected in the perception of its relationship with the Chinese people. The following passage from Jiang Zemin's speech to celebrate the founding of the Chinese Communist Party represents the mentality typical of the Chinese leadership: The basic task to develop socialist culture is to train citizens of one generation after another to have ideals, social mores, culture and discipline. [We] must insist on arming the people with scientific theories, guiding them with correct mass media, and molding them with noble spirit and inspiring them with fine literature and art. [We] must insist upon and strengthen the leading position of Marxism, help people to set up the correct world-view, view on life, and value system, strengthen [their] belief in Marxism, strengthen their belief in socialism, strengthen their faith in the Reform and Modernization, and strengthen their trust in the Party and the government.

the Chinese people, but also on raising their [spiritual] quality. In other word, we should always facilitate the overall development of the people. This is the basic requirement of Marxism on building a new socialist society.[70] To the Chinese leadership, to ensure a "Chinese-style" modernization, it is necessary to "modernize" the mind of the Chinese with communist ideology, so as ensure their continuous allegiance to communism. Here, the underlying premise is to administer social engineering. For the Chinese leadership, control of human quality can mean intervention, and surveillance of human behavior; exemplary behavior can mean conformity and subjugation, and finally, modern society of order can mean stability and harmony. "Exemplary past" can refer to memories of the past, however, but used as a conscious and calculated way of controlling the modern. If we search for the underlying assumption by the Chinese leadership behind this rationale, we see a will to control pre-determines all these elements.[71]

The official attempt to define exemplary human behavior and norms reflects the inflexibility of the Chinese leadership. When the norm is not allowed to fluctuate, or when a norm prescribed from above no longer has a basis in social practice, it turns into a "super-social norm" according to Bakken. This represents a real problem for the regime in its attempts to establish social standards during a period of reform. "Instead of having an integrative and cohesive effect, the inflexible and 'super-social' norm becomes a challenge to order."[72] This is a kind of mentality discussed in Karl Mannheim's "Ideology and Utopia." Of a "utopian" mentality, he says: "We get a reappearance of the concrete promise of a better world… for this mentality, promises of a better world

[70] Jiang Zemin, "Speech to Commemorate the Founding," 3.
[71] It should be noted that these are not the inventions of Chinese Communist Party, but standard Leninism.
[72] Bakken, *Exemplary Society,* 26-7.

removed in time and space are like uncashable cheques – their only function is to fix that point in the 'world beyond events,' and from which he, who is expectantly waiting for the propitious moment, can be assured of detachment from that which is merely in the process of becoming."[73] In Mannheim's view, "the human mentality" should never be fixed in one mode but has to change as the society changes. Indeed, though the Chinese leadership claims that China has moved toward modernization, it has not adapted its ideological mindset to go along with the economic reform. To achieve a utopian state of communism, where the world of "Great Harmony" is realized, still holds sway. With such a goal, the government engages in the perpetual task of adapting Chinese people's political view to the communist standard. To the Chinese leadership, it is possible to have two processes of modernizations going on at the same time. There is, on the one hand, the "economic reform," where science and technology are introduced to alter the physical configuration of the country. There is also, on the other hand, the "spiritual civilization," where communist ideology should continue to transform the political thinking of the Chinese people. This mode of thought fits into the "utopian" state of mind critiqued by Mannheim. It has also become the stumbling block to hold back the progress of China's economic modernization.

In reality, the Chinese leadership puts into practice this "Utopian" mentality. It adopts various strategies to regulate the changes of modernization. Political scientist Gordon White sees incorporation, apart from repression, as the strategy Chinese leadership uses to deal with emergent social forces.[74] The case in point is the much talked about move by the Chinese leadership to allow capitalists to join the Chinese

[73] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harvest Book, 1936), 218.
[74] Gordon White, "The Dynamics of Civil Society in Post-Mao China," *The Individual and State in China,* ed. Brian Hook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 205.

Communist Party. The move is a good example of use of what White calls the strategy of incorporation. But in contemporary China, capitalists have been long assimilated into the revolutionary ranks, and, hence, there is the communist term, "Red Capitalists." This gesture is more ceremonial than of real political significance.[75]

But there is just so much the government can do to incorporate the unruly forces. Increasingly a gray area is appearing, where the leadership's reach is limited. According to official statistics by the Chinese leadership, as of June, 1999, of unofficial organizations and associations that had formally registered with the government, there are 1,800 national and nearly 200,000 regional associations, research institutes, and foundations, most of which are led by non-Communist party members.[76] Faced with the increasing development of the gray area, the Chinese leadership has zoned out "a permissive zone," which "involves the modern relocation of social boundaries."[77]

Chinese leadership's utopian mentality, their attempt to direct the course of modernization, and their desires to control the people's mind, are bound to be challenged in reality. The Chinese people had previously felt they had no part in Chinese politics, apart from being the subject of conformity and subjugation; but now they are becoming citizens able to make demands on the political system. Though the Chinese government has attempted to exercise tight control over the political allegiance of these groups, the sheer existence of these groups reflects the beginning of what political scientists call

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[75] Bruce Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[76] "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu falungong de wenjian"[Documents of the Central Government on Falungong], *Beijing Spring* 97 (2001), 11.

[77] Bakken explains the nature of a "permissive zone" as "we regard the line as a boundary line where transgression is no longer permitted. These are not real lines or real zones; rather, we are speaking of a narrative that involves the modern relocation of social boundaries" Bakken, *Exemplary Society.*

"civil societies."[78] As the rise of Falungong suggests, the attempted control over these informal groups is being severely challenged. What Falungong has clamored for is freedom of belief and the need for a space to exercise its own beliefs and values.

The feeling of being challenged is best reflected in a remark made by Jiang Zemin in a meeting of the Chinese Political Bureau, the core leadership of the Chinese Communist Party on April 25, 1999, soon after Falungong members staged a large-scale sit-in in Zhongnanhai, Beijing, the headquarters of the Chinese leadership. A perplexed Jiang says: "Since April 25, as I have been pondering, our Party has been carrying out the revolution and [socialist] constructions for almost eighty years; we have the political power, and we have more than two million people's army, sixty million Communist Party members, a great number of high-ranking leaders, but how on earth has the problem of Falungong appeared? And its members are making so much trouble."[79] Jiang's comments reflect a key communist attitude: as long as the communist government are in command of political power, institutions, and the army, it should be able to control the bodies and minds of the Chinese people with a coercive policy.

When there is transgression of the so-called permissive zone, the government resorts to suppression. The suppression of Falungong is a classical example. In 1999, in the height of the anti-Falungong campaign, all the accusations against the movement were about control, particularly control of the mind. This is spelled out blatantly in *People Daily*. One editorial says forcefully: "[We] must fully understand the political nature of Falungong; [we] must realize that Falungong is a political force attempting to contend with our Party and government. Falungong is a political dissenting force to

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[78] For discussion on civil society in China, see, for example, Timothy Brook and B Michael Frolic eds., *Civil Society in China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

[79] "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu falungong de wenjian," 10.

negate Marxist ideology. And Falungong attempts to fight with our Party for the control of the broad masses, and for the control of the ideological arena.[80] This passage is the official designation of the "crime" of Falungong. Falungong had started out as a health exercise group and it did not have any immediate political agenda in the beginning of its rise. The official accusations about Falungong illuminate a hypersensitivity of the leadership to any dissenting sentiment. By its attempt to suppress Falungong, the government in effect makes a political movement.

In June 1999, the Chinese government declared Falungong a "cult." As the *People's Daily* comments: "Cult is a cancer to society. It is an international phenomenon. It cannot be tolerated by any responsible government. Organizations of cults usually assume the false pretense of religion, *qigong* (meditation exercise), and so on, distort religious scriptures, deify cult leaders, spread superstitious theories and control the masses."[81] In the Chinese context, if the government brands an organization a "cult," this means that the group is deviant, illegitimate and the target of public accusations and official suppression. Or, to put it simply, it becomes a public enemy.

In Chinese ancient history, examples are abundant that when social conflicts become too acute, new religious sects, deviating from the state religion, also rise to function as social critique, which is often reflected in negating the value system of the existing society and becoming the spiritual center of force. Shang Jiuyun, a doctoral candidate from Beijing Normal University, gives an example:

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[80] "Chongfen renshi falungong zhuzhi de zhengzhi benzhi"[Fully Realize the Political Nature of Falungong], *People's Daily,* Mar. 8, 1999, overseas edition.

[81] "Yifa zhiguo, yancheng xiejiao"[Rule the Country by Law, and Suppress the Cult Severely], *People's Daily,* Nov. 1, 1999, overseas edition.

> The end of Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 C.E.) is one of the darkest periods in ancient Chinese political history. The emperor was dissolute and incompetent and neglected state affairs; eunuchs usurped the power and imperial relatives meddled with state affairs. The ruling class exploited people to such a degree that they were not able to maintain subsistence. The gap between the rich and the poor had reached an extreme degree. Social conflicts became exceedingly acute. Under such conditions, the early Taoist sect, the Taiping Dao proposed the religious idealism of universal peace. It received the instant and powerful response from the common people.[82]

As Shang further explains, "religion insists on justice, fairness and benevolence, which is directed against the injustice, unfairness and disrespect for the people. All religions are socially critical and insist upon reform and change, so as to make every member of the society but not a few members of the ruling class happy."[83]

The appearance of Falungong is a social critique to the illness of modernity in contemporary era. In this sense, it parallels religious movements such as the movement of new religions in the American society in the mid twentieth century. Of the rise of the new religions in America, Robert Wuthnow says: "The 'New Religions' protest were directed not so much at theological issues but at the arrangement and norms of social life. They accepted for the most part the idea that personal betterment, even enlightenment, could be gained by manipulating the social forces around them, for example, by intentionally violating traditional norms, by creating their own communities, and by

[82] Shang Jiuyun, "Shilun zhongjiao zhi gongneng" [On the Function of Religion], *Journal of Zhengzhou University,* no. 4 (1997): 56.
[83] Ibid., 55.

ritually manipulating their own behavior."[84] Falungong, with its moral pursuit and religious rituals, sees itself as providing alternatives to detrimental practices created by modernity. These alternatives are "new," in the sense that all of their activities are organized around individuals becoming masters of their own fate. Scholars of religious studies, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge thus observe: "Cults do not have a prior tie with another established religious body in the society in question. In a high state of tension with the surrounding socio-cultural environment, the cult adds to that culture a new revelation or insight justifying the claim that it is different, new, more advanced, represents a deviant religious tradition in society."[85]

Summary of Chapters

In order to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of Falungong, I have given careful considerations in sequencing the six chapters of my dissertation. I begin chapter one by providing information on Falungong's beliefs and practices, its points of contention with the Chinese leadership, its organizational system as well as the cause of occurrence. Having read the first chapter, readers gain knowledge of what is Falungong and how it has become the foe of the Chinese government. Next, I argue that in contemporary times, Chinese social actors inherit from tradition as their moral and ideological guidance and appeal. I start by discussing in chapter two Falungong's roots in Taoism, Buddhism, and White Lotus, and how it inherits from and uses, in a creative manner, these classical traditions in its contention with the Chinese leadership. I also

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[84] Robert Wuthnow, "The Cultural Context of Contemporary Religious Movement," *Cults, Culture and Law: Perspectives on New Religious Movement*, ed. Thomas Robbins et al. (Chico, Calif.: Scholar Press, 1985), 47.

[85] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 25-26.

discuss how Confucianism informs modern practices of the Chinese leadership. In chapter three, I uncover how Falungong and the Chinese leadership produce rhetorical discourses in a contemporary setting informed by their interpretations of disputed traditional values. Having located their links to tradition, I next turn my attention to the contemporary appeals of the Falungong movement in chapter four, in which I talk about its therapeutic role, its idealism and its formation of critical consciousness in members. Then as I argue that a contemporary spiritual dissent movement is inherently linked to Chinese political culture, I discuss in chapters five Marxist materialism, authoritarianism, and scientism, the ideological foundations of Chinese leadership. I contend that Falungong has made a distinct departure from these political values. Finally, in chapter six, I provide discussions on Falungong's contribution to humanism as a response and a critique of Chinese communist political culture.

The current chapter serves as an introduction to the dissertation. It orients readers to a contextual understanding of Falungong. In addition to performing the perfunctory role of giving a literature review and a methodology, it bring readers to understand why Falungong is perceived as a threat by the Chinese government. It also provides discussions on the rise of Falungong, its communication and mobilization structures, and its rhetorical strategies. To place Falungong in the context of contemporary Chinese politics, I offer in the second part of the discussion of the orthodoxy of the Chinese leadership.

Chapter two is a background study of the ancient Chinese religious traditions of White Lotus, Taoism and Buddhism, and their link to Falungong. Falungong learns from these religious traditions by incorporating elements of them into its ideological tenets. In

particular, Li Hongzhi's prophecy of the degradation of human kind and the rebirth of universe is heavily influenced by the teachings of White Lotus. In the meanwhile, Taoism and Buddhism provide Falungong movement with cultural ethos. They lend their authority and weight to an emerging social movement that hopes to occupy a prominent place in the political scene of the contemporary Chinese politics. Furthermore, Buddhism and Taoism also serve as the moral touchstones for the Falungong movement. Following the classical religions, Falungong upholds religious humanism, and places the well being of humanity as its primary concern. In contrast, the Chinese leadership resorts the conservative strain of the tradition to serve its contemporary interests. The leadership recalls Confucianism to safeguard its legitimacy, and to ward off the increasing societal challenge to its claim of supreme leadership position.

To provide further understanding on the revival of tradition by Falungong and Chinese leadership, chapter three is a rhetorical analysis of how both parties use classical concepts to in contemporary context. They revive ethical beliefs in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism to reverse the moral decline of the Chinese society. The goal of this chapter is to inform readers about how the clash between Falungong and the Chinese leadership is reflected in their disputed interpretations of tradition, and how this clash is carried out discursively.

Chapter four focuses on the contemporary appeals of Falungong. The spiritual movement rises initially to offer consolation and therapy to the disadvantaged Chinese by providing a haven for the Chinese to relieve their distress and bodily pain. Yet, Falungong is able to achieve long-lasting moral and cultural appeals. It presents an alternative social blueprint that gives hope to ordinary Chinese. It cultivates in members

a strong sense of idealism and encourage them to engage in moral quests to bring changes to Chinese society.

Chapter five explores the tenets and rhetorical expressions of Marxist materialism, authoritarianism and scientism, the ideological foundations of contemporary Chinese political culture. These uniformly suppress subjectivity and suppress humanity. The rise of Falungong is a distinct departure from these values as it encourages its members to press for individuality, critical reflection, and humanity.

The concluding chapter discusses the challenge Falungong presents to the future political order in China. It centers on Falungong's contribution to humanism and its critique of authoritarian scientism. Three generations of Chinese, from the Cultural Revolution era, before the economic reforms, and in the present era, are compared to reveal their respective imprint on Chinese politics. The chapter draws the conclusion that Falungong members' actions are indicative of a marked change in Chinese political culture; Chinese citizens' contention with the government for justice and humanity is becoming a permanent fixture.

The Falungong phenomenon is not an isolated occurrence but suggests a society-wide sentiment to clamor for justice and humanity. It is common knowledge now that various forms of protests against the government from different segments of Chinese society occur on a daily basis. They include labor unrest, farmer discontent, ethnic insurgence, city residents suing the government, students demonstrations, and so on. The study of the clash between Falungong and the Chinese leadership offers to provide readers with a few insights into the changing mentality of the Chinese people and their struggle for a more just society.

As Western communication scholars open themselves to study non-Western nations, they should look for ways to apply fundamental approaches such as Bitzer's "Rhetorical Situation," but also to modify and enrich these concepts and models in order to accommodate cultural and historical complexities. I attempt here to delineate a multifarious social phenomenon in contemporary China within the broad framework of ancient tradition, history, and culture, that can help explain the Falungong phenonmenon while also enriching communication scholarship.

Chapter Two

Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and White Lotus Sect as Moral Foundations of Contemporary Social Actors

In the study of politics and society of any developing country, particularly China with its history of 5,000 years, a major point of interest is the tension between modernity and tradition. On the surface, modernity seems to have a winning hand. The importation of western science and technology has consistently brought about tremendous economic development and physical reconfigurations of the society. Today, any westerner visiting China will be struck by the numerous skyscrapers, the trendy western-style clothing donned by the Chinese, and the onslaught of western media, especially music and cinema. The initial impression of the foreign visitor is that China is surely on its path to becoming a "westernized" country. But just as importantly, modernity has also brought along western concepts of democracy. In China, this has brought a heightened sensitivity to unjust treatment by the government. As a result, the Chinese people increasingly demand more autonomy and emancipation from conformity and subjugation. Modernity is looked to hopefully as a complete break with the past.

Has China then forsaken all of its ancient traditions? Thomas Metzger gives us a hint of the interdependent relationship between modernity and tradition. As he notes, "we must still ask to what extent the transformative impulse to make this break [of modernity from tradition] paradoxically depends on indigenous intellectual resources,

and what cultural patterns have persistently been unbroken."[86] What is implicit in Metzger's comments is that tradition, often in the form of culture, may provide a foundation on which modernity is practiced. What is also assumed in Metzger's comments is that even though modernity is introduced to replace tradition, some indigenous modes of practice are bound to persist. To appreciate this, we need to look no further than how modernity was recently introduced in the former USSR and China. Both countries introduced western style reforms into their state systems and institutions. However, depending on the disparate local traditions in the two countries, the reforms took on different forms. In the former USSR, western-style democracy has replaced the old political superstructure; whereas in China, a market economy has been first adopted. It is a myth, therefore, that modernity can be imported wholesale and is completely revolutionary. Local conditions and traditions still matter. To use an analogy here, tradition is like the soil. Modernity is, at best, a grafted plant

Rather than assuming that modernity destroys tradition, we should consider how tradition influences modernity. Social theorist Anthony Giddens sees tradition as having a key role in articulating action and providing an ontological framework: it offers an organizing medium of social life specifically geared to ontological precepts.[87] By "ontological" framework and percepts, Giddens refers to our perspective on the world. That is, tradition helps define the very objects and category of experience. Others explain the normative values of tradition. As Bakken argues, "Tradition always has a 'binding,' normative character. 'Normative' implies a moral component: in traditional practices, the binding quality of activities expresses percepts about how things should and should

[86] Thomas Metzger, Escape from Predicament: New-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 18.
[87] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 48.

not be done."[88] In the context of China, the moral appeal of tradition serves different purposes for different social groups. For the hegemonic group, tradition often supports norms of conservatism, stability, and predictability. It is often used as a preemptive moral force to guide the behavior of the people. For less established social groups, tradition can provide proof by ethos by giving practices "an authenticating firmness,"[89] and it can offer a basis for resistance. In sum, tradition becomes a rhetorical resource that may be used for or against change.

One would not understand how tradition is useful for contemporary social actors without a contextual understanding of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, for these religious systems form the very basis of Chinese political and cultural tradition. They influence the practice of modern political actors including both the Chinese leadership and Falungong. This chapter provides an analysis of key elements of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It aims to uncover aspects of these classical thoughts and relate them to the contemporary rhetorical practice of the Chinese government and Falungong.

The Confucian Subject

Over the centuries, Confucianism has promoted a social order based on a hierarchical society. The famous "Three Principles and Five Constants" provide guidelines for personal, familial and social relationships. The "Three Principles," which refer to subjects obeying the emperor, sons their fathers, and wives their husbands,

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[88] Børge Bakken, *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control and Dangers of Mondernity in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

[89] The phrase I use in the paragraph, "an authenticating firmness" is inspired by Gidden's quote: "[When] traditional modes of practice are dominant, the past inserts a wide band of 'authenticated practice' into the future. Time is not empty, and a consistent 'mode of being' relates future to past. In addition, tradition creates a sense of the firmness of things that typically mixes cognitive and moral elements. The world is as it is because it is as it should be." Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity,* 48.

stipulate officially sanctioned "proper" relationships going from the most macroscopically social to the most microscopically personal. The "Five Constants," which refer to the five "virtuous" qualities an individual should possess – benevolence, righteousness, rites, wisdom and faith – underlie the Confucian attitude about how an individual should conduct himself in relation to family and society.[90] The Confucian scenario of an ordered society starts with a virtuous man, and depends on a network of culturally ratified social relationships. The following text from *the Analects of Confucius* is indicative of the correlation of the cultivation of a Confucian "virtuous" man and an ordered society, as perceived by Confucius: "A man who respects his parents and his elders would hardly be inclined to defy his superiors. A man who is not inclined to defy his superiors will never forment a rebellion. A gentleman works at the root. Once the root is secured, the way unfolds." [91] Yet, to relate to the focus of this chapter, we are interested in finding out the impact of such a social blueprint on the development of an individual in traditional Chinese society. Implicitly hinted in the "Three Principles" is the expectation of an individual who should always put the interest of the family and the state first. By extension, his own interest and well-being become secondary. Indeed, throughout the long history of China, Confucianism cultivates in an individual a heightened sense of responsibilities and obligations, and obliviousness of self-interest. William de Bary's characterization of a Confucian personhood defines the position of a Chinese individual in the larger social schema: "Man defines his 'self' in relation to

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[90] It is difficult to understand a persona's characters from the traditional translation of "Five Constants," as mentioned in the chapter. Therefore, I have attempted to add my own explanations as follows: "benevolence" refers to a person's mild and kind temperament; with "righteousness," one attains a sense of appropriateness by following traditional mores; "rite" means either being respectful or complying with traditionally sanctioned rites or ceremonies; "wisdom" is being wise and knowledgeable; and "faith" is being trustworthy.

[91] *Confucius: the Analects,* trans D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 3.

others and the Way which unites them.[92] Thus is constructed the web of reciprocal obligations and moral relations in which man finds himself and defines himself. Apart from these he can have no real identity." [93] de Barry informs us of two essential characters of a Confucian personhood: one, a man's sense of responsibilities of obligations to his family and his state, when sanctioned as morals, forestall any space of the development of personal character; and two, an individual has to devote wholeheartedly to serve familial and social responsibilities.

A Confucian person as a creature caught in the web of familial and social obligations and moral relations is certainly appropriate, yet more can be said if we show the inner tensions, or rather, the lack of it, an individual experiences. (To use an analogy here, a devoted Chinese Communist Party member in the revolutionary era also is considered a personality of subordination and conformity. But it is known even he/she experiences inner struggles in the face of moral dilemma). In this light, Wolfgang Kubin's characterization of a Confucian personhood informs us of the complexities existing within a Confucian personhood. He divides a Confucian personality into three components, inspired by Herbert Marcuse's use of Freudian theory of the interaction between the two principles of pleasure and reality.[94] Adapting Marcuse's theory, as

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[92] The Way, or alternately named the Tao, is a major metaphysical concept in Chinese classical philosophy. It is part of the four major metaphysical concepts of principle (*li*), material force (*chi*), the substance of Tao, and the Great Whole. The term is derived from the Neo-Confucian proposition of the "Ultimate of Non-being and also the Great Ultimate," which means that the universe is a "universal operation" or "a great functioning" through the process of "daily renewal" and incessant change. In later uses, the Way is used to symbolize morality, order, and standards.

[93] Willaim Theodore de Barry, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in the Ming Thought," *Self and Society in Ming Thought,* ed. Willaim Theodore de Barry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 149.

[94] Herbert Marcuse talks of the "it" – the unconscious, the private urge, which under the influence of the environment develops into the "I" – the adaptation, acting as a mediator between the "it" and the environment This "I" encounters an "over-I" in the shape of individual's parents which takes concrete shape in the form of moral code which, in turn, is internalized conscience: feeling of guilt, and need for self-punishment. Thus, the principle of reality supplants the principle of pleasure.

Kubin notes, the "it" – the primal urges – could be represented by the "lesser" or the "private" I, while the "I"- the adaptation – could be the "greater" or "collective" I, and finally, the "over I" could be symbolized by the clan on the one hand, and Confucian moral code on the other.[95] In the Confucian scheme of things, the "lesser" or "private" I is suppressed; a personhood is essentially based on a mitigating relationship between the collective I (the adaptation to the environment) and the over-I (the family and clan on the one hand, and the moral order on the other hand). As Kubin once again points out, "the 'Self' is not the expression of 'one's own Self' but of the epiphany of what is universally valid. Consequently, the history of the Self in China is one of progressive (self) control, not of liberation."[96] At this point, we understand better when Metzger introduces the term "oneness of ontology" to describe the lack of self-awareness and critical self-introspection, and the inability to demarcate itself vis à vis others implicit in a Confucian personhood.

Is it then possible to become a Confucian personality? According to Confucianism, the answer is yes. One has to untiringly cultivate oneself. Indeed, the concept of man represented in "Analects," the canon of Confucianism, is that of a self-observing, and self-regulating being. Turns of phrases such as "examine yourself" (*xing wushen*), (*zi xing*), "purify yourself" (*jie qi shen*), (*jie ji*), "put yourself right" (*zheng qi shen*), "cultivate yourself" (*xiu ji*), "watch yourself" (*gong ji*) are prevalent throughout the entire text of the "Analects."[97] The end of self-cultivation is to understand natural hierarchies and to appreciate one's proper place in these hierarchies. Understanding,

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[95] Wolfgang Kubin, "On the Problem of the Self in Confucianism," *Confucianism and the Modernization of China,* ed. Silke Drieger and Rolf Trauzettel (Mainz, Germany: Hase and Koehler Verlag, 1991), 70.
[96] Ibid., 69.
[97] Ibid., 73.

although achieved by looking within, makes the individual aware of what he has in common with other men. Every man, it is believed, finds the same feelings, the same moral imperatives, and the same impetus toward proper conduct.[98]

With such a "virtuous" model of personhood, what is Confucius hoping to achieve socially? The following is a Confucian vision of an idealized society: "To overcome one's own self, and to turn towards the rules of good behavior (*li*) would bring about morality *(ren)*; by overcoming its own Self, and turning toward the rule of good behavior for a day, the whole world would be made to embrace morality."[99] The potential social significance of a Confucian personhood on the larger society is apparent: the subjugation of self-interest to conform to the filial and social responsibilities leads to uniform social behaviors; thus the harmony and stability of the larger society are made possible. Or to frame the argument in a sociopolitical perspective, we could see that a trajectory is formed that starts with a Confucian personhood and ends with a macro political order: A personality characterized by dependence, the repression of emotion, lack of self-esteem, and lack of legitimate protest is analogous to the formation of the political order of familialism, particularism, collectivism and authoritarianism, all of which grow out of the ideological assumptions of Confucianism.[100]

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[98] Christina Whitman, " Privacy in Early Confucian and Taoist Thought," *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values,* ed. Donald Monro (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), 96.

[99] Kubin, "On the Problem of Self," 71.

[100] The concluding part is inspired by a paragraph in Metzger's book, *Escape from Predicament.* All the terms in my paragraph are those originally used by Metzger. However, the original paragraph is written in a different context: "The pattern of Confucian self-assertion and interdependence can be grossly contrasted with Western individualism, but we cannot describe it unqualifiedly in terms of dependence, the repression of emotion, the abhorrence of aggressive behavior, lack of self-esteem, lack of notion of legitimated protest, familialism, collectivism, authoritarianism and particularism." Metzger, *Escape from Predicament,* 15-16.

The Confucian model of a personality reveals a metaphysical quality that is culturally significant. In the mundane sense, a Confucian man is a dutiful one: from cradle to grave, the path he follows is one "laid out" by tradition; in his days in grade school, his education starts with learning by heart rhymes which reflect rudimentary Confucian ideas; as he gets older, as a son, a husband, and later on a father, he has to fulfill each role according to traditional mores. Yet, such a man reaches the status of an epiphany – a superhuman being: he lives a lifetime fulfilling filial and social responsibilities without self-growth. What are implicit in such a personality are the concepts of the ultimate, the unconditional, the infinite, the eternal and lasting validity, all a reflection of the metaphysical nature of Confucianism. Hence, it is no coincidence that throughout Chinese history, the Confucian model of personhood has been upheld by the establishment as an exemplary model for the common people. The irony is that the Confucian model is only enforceable when the imperial dynasty prospers. Yet, the long Chinese history is punctuated by declines of dynasties, when moral decay and social ills prevail. "In this sense, Confucianism reveals its metaphysical deficiency from its ability to deal with the questions of an even-changing reality versus the constancy of eternity and the final fate of mankind," C. K. Yang writes, "from its ability to inspire confidence and give consolation to man in the face of overpowering adversity and suffering."[101]

A connection then can be made between Confucianism and modern day Chinese politics. Confucianism promotes a benign form of governing – providing moral guidance for the common people to follow. Even though the Confucian model of government is a "benevolent" one, mainly resorting to moral admonition rather than coercion, elements of

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[101] C.K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 124.

social engineering and social control can be strongly detected. Its aim to achieve an authoritarian hierarchical social order is complementary to the governing style of the modern Chinese government.

Another commonality of Confucianism and modern day Chinese politics is the persistent reform of the individual. The goal of Confucianism is to cultivate a personality to such a degree, that, when left unsupervised, it still behaves in a consistent and stable manner. It is apparent that it is the autonomic behavior a *reformed* individual Confucius counts on. When a society is filled with such individuals, a strong measure of stability and harmony is achieved. Such a scenario is politically expedient for the current Chinese leadership when the Chinese society faces forces of resistance and erosion of control.

A Taoist Model of Personhood

No one can hope to understand Chinese philosophy, religion, government, art, and medicine without an appreciation of the profound philosophy of Taoism. Chinese civilization and the Chinese character would have been utterly different if Taoism had not come into existence. Even Confucianism, the dominant system in Chinese history and thought, would not have been the same, for like Buddhism, it has not escaped Taoist influence. While Confucianism emphasizes social order and an active life, Taoism concentrates on individual life and tranquility. By opposing Confucian conformity with non-conformity and opposing Confucian worldliness with a transcendental spirit, Taoism is, in fact, highly critical of Confucianism.[102]

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[102] Taoism generally refers to both Laotzu, who wrote *Tao Te Ching,* and Chuangtzu, who wrote *Chuang-tzu.* Fung Yu-lan, the prominent Chinese philosopher, makes the following comment about Laotzu and Chuangtzu: "The name, Taoism, was first coined by Han scholars, who used it to include both Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, because their doctrines, although no identical, were at least in opposing the traditional

To understand a Taoist model of an individual, one has to start with an understanding of the basic attitude of Taoism on life. To start, a Taoist individual is known for his close affinity to nature. The following passage, from *Chuang Tzu*, represents a typical Taoist attitude towards life, an attitude of advocating simplicity and naturalness,

> Once a sea bird alighted in the suburbs of the Lu capital. The marquis of Lu escorted it to the ancestral temple, where he entertained it, performing the Nine Shao music for it to listen to and presenting it with the meat of the T'ao-lao sacrifice to feast on. But the bird only looked dazed and forlorn, refusing to eat a single slice of meat or drink a cup of wine, and in three days it was dead. This is to try to nourish a bird with what would nourish you instead of what would nourish a bird. If you want to nourish a bird with what nourishes a bird, then you should let it roost in the deep forest, play among the banks and islands, float on the rivers and lakes, eat mudfish and minnows, follow the rest of flock in flight and rest, and live any way it chooses.[103]

This attitude towards life, an attitude of promoting simplicity and naturalness, represents the most basic strain of the Taoist belief system. This passage reveals the Taoist aesthetics – choosing the natural and simple over that which is man-made and refined. It

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thought and institutions of their time. Another point of agreement was the fact that the two fundamental conceptions of which they spoke of, the Way (*Tao*) and the Power (*Te*), had for both men the same meaning." Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 1:175.

[103] *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writing,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 116.

also shows a distinctly Taoist ideological attitude – let nature run its own course. The latter Taoist attitude is extended to other areas, most notably to its views on government and human affairs. Thus this passage can be read not only as about Taoist aesthetics, but also as about his attitude towards political philosophy. The following passage from Lao-tzu's *Tao te Ching* further illustrates a Taoist attitude toward human life:

> Which is more vital, fame or health;
> which is more precious, health or riches;
> which is more harmful, loss or gain;
> the deeper the love, the higher the cost;
> the bigger the treasure, the greater the loss;
> who knows contentment suffers no shame;
> who knows restraint encounters no trouble;
> and thus lives long.[104]

The Taoist spiritual and non-materialistic view towards life results in a mentality of quietude, with which a Taoist is able to handle the vicissitude of the human world. As Judith Berling explains, a Taoist individual typically "cultivates emotional inner peace, appreciates the beauty and experience of life in itself. He orients toward the source and unity of life and being [and] transcends the petty problems of mundane world and the

[104] *Lao-tzu's Taoteching,* trans. Red Pine (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1996), 88.

institutions of society. He sought to clarify the inner dimension of self with the spiritual dimension of the whole."[105]

Over the past centuries, scholars of Chinese classical religions have labeled the Taoist personhood "negative,"[106] since, for its aloofness, it has no effect on the status of other individuals. But there is a limit to this view: Taoist beliefs are necessary for self-preservation, a quality essential for ordinary Chinese living in a society filled with injustice and pain. A Taoist seeks reclusion as a way to relieve the suffering of the secular world. Lin Yutang, a noted Chinese scholar of comparative studies of Chinese and American cultures, calls Taoism, along with Buddhism, "people's religions,"[107] meaning they are popular religions people can turn to in times of need. Lin's comments on the timing of the rise of Buddhism also illuminate the nature of Taoism. He says, "Buddhism means to the Chinese people what religion means in other countries, namely, something that comes to the rescue when human reason falters or fails..., There is justification enough in a chaotic country for the popularity of a religion which declares the vanity of the world and offers a refuge from the pains and vicissitudes of this earthly life."[108] The ameliorative functions of both Taoism and Buddhism lie in their exhortation for believers to transcend from worldly desires and reach a higher spiritual plane.

While the Buddhism adopts a renunciatory attitude towards secular life, Taoism promotes a transcendent and non-chalant view towards the human world; when life

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[105]Judith Berling, "Self and Whole in Chuang Tzu," *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Value,* ed. Donald J. Monro (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), 117.
[106] de Barry, "Individulism," 146-147.
[107] Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1935), 124 .
[108] Ibid., 124-125.

becomes too unbearable, reclusion is considered as a viable alternative. The following passage, from *Chuang Tzu*, reflects this Taoist attitude towards human life:

> The True Man of ancient times knew nothing of loving life, knew nothing of hating death. He emerged without delight; he went back in without fuss. He came briskly, he went briskly, and that was all. He did not forget where he began; he did not try to find out where he would end. He received something and took pleasure in it; he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to help out Heaven. This is what I call the True Man.[109]

To a modern reader, especially to a western reader, this passage sounds rather mystical. But it is this attitude of not exerting oneself towards anything that this passage informs us of the Taoist value towards transcendence. In the Taoist sense, the ultimate goal for an individual is to become a Perfect Man, who, though a recluse, has achieved a pure existence, as indicated by the following passage from *Chuang Tzu*:

> The sage leans on the sun and moon, tucks the universe under his arm, merges himself with things, leaves the confusion and muddle as it is, and looks on slaves as exalted. Ordinary men strain and struggle; the sage is stupid and blockish. He takes part in ten thousand ages and achieves simplicity in oneness. For him, all the ten thousand things are what they are, and thus they unfold each other.[110]

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[109] Chuang Tzu, 74.
[110] Ibid., 142.

From this passage, we can readily see a display of a Taoist attitude of detachment from worldly concerns, thus liberating oneself from human sentiments. Reclusion is seen as a higher form of human existence.

In the practical sense, the transcendence of a Taoist has sociological significance. As Christina Whitman argues, "In Taoism, withdrawal is regarded as a means of survival, and unfortunate necessity in troubled times. Avoidance of social ties and obligations has a means of self-preservation."[111] The concrete example of the therapeutic role of Taoism, like Buddhism, is evidenced in the use of Taoist monasteries. They are regarded as temples for the general welfare of the people. Inside the walls, each monastery or nunnery represented a miniature sacred order of life different from the secular social order, presumed to be perfect, capable of correcting all the imperfections of the material world, and designed for saving men from everlasting suffering.[112]

We should note that this transcendental spirit of Taoism is at odds with Confucian worldliness. Confucianism adopts a positive approach: it advocates invasive social control, enforces hierarchical social order, and attempts to bring about officially sanctioned moral behavior in the Chinese people. Despite their differences, both Confucianism and Taoism have risen to fulfill social needs in Chinese society. As BurtonWatson notes: "all philosophers of ancient China address themselves to the same problem: how is man to live in a world dominated by chaos, suffering and absurdity. Nearly all of them answered with some concrete plan of action designed to reform the individual, to reform society and eventually to free world from its ills."[113] Throughout the long Chinese history, Confucianism has always represented the official ideology. But

[111] Whitman, "Privacy," 91.
[112] Yang, Religion in Chinese Society, 14.
[113] Burton Watson, *Basic Writings: Zhuang Zi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

the rationalistic qualities Confucianism represents reveal a metaphysical limitation. As C. K.Yang explains: "it did not appear adequate to meet the challenge from the vast domain of the unknown, to explain convincingly the extraordinary phenomena of society and nature, to deal with frustration and shock from tragedies in the crises of life including death, to lift man's spirit above the level of selfish and utilitarian involvement in the mundane world so as to give a man and a higher cause for unity and harmony with his fellow, or to justify the enduring goodness of the moral order in the face of morally unaccountable success and failure."[114]

In stark contrast, both Taoism and Buddhism have a strong humanistic bent, and they play sociological roles that cannot be replaced by Confucianism. Compared to Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have performed entirely different roles. Both religions adopt a renunciatory attitude toward the human world and seek spiritual transcendence and unity with the divine and ideal. The religious experience performs a humanitarian role, bringing consolation, liberation, harmony and peace in the face of conflicts, evil, suffering in life, as both religions put special emphasis on the heart, the feelings, and trans-rational intuition.

The promise of Taoism and Buddhism to deliver believers from pain, and to transcend to a better and ideal world inevitably becomes a shared moral faith to rally believers to work towards realizing an idealistic goal. When religious believers make it their commitment to realize idealistic goals represented in the religious faith, their focus on everyday utilitarian concerns is elevated to that of striving for an idealistic goal; the efforts to realize such a visionary world creates an energy which can be turned into a resistant force to challenge the status quo. It is known that Taoism and Buddhism tend to

[114] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 19-20.

rise during prolonged periods of disunity following the collapse of a dynasty; it is also known that Taoism, in particular, has been consistently used as the organizing ideological principle by rebellious groups in both ancient and modern times.[115]

Taoist rituals facilitate moral actions, and in that sense, they promote the engagement of reversing the decline of the society by individual efforts. For example, Laozi's *Tao de Ching* taught that redemption of sin comes not only through prayer but also through charity and the building of roads. It is through this common engagement of charity and volunteer deeds by Taoist believers that a universal brotherhood is formed. To a large extent, this notion of individual engagement in actively changing the society results in a profound moral empowerment among believers, which accounts for the tenacity of religious believers in times of opposition.[116]

Chuang Tzu's sense of moral activism has a distinct political overtone. His objection to Confucianism is the hierarchy of social order. Chuang Tzu views a hierarchical society with defined norms and rules as distorting and unnaturally limiting human potential. As Berling explains "[Chuang Tzu] found such a view of the human world too constricting in that it unquestionably accepts pre-established hierarchies and norms, and [he] further argues that the natural order of which humans are a part cannot be institutionalized and defined in laws, rituals or the classics. Chuang Tzu's argument

[115] For example, in ancient times, the rebellious group, White Lotus sect, has drawn its magical rituals from Taoism. For more discussion on the connection between political rebellions and the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, see chapter nine, "religion and political rebellions." Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society,* 218-243.

[116] I argue that the formation of a brotherhood and the moral empowerment from individual effort to change the society are very much the sources that provide Falungong members the idealistic and moral faith.

implies that in order to find the free and autonomous self, one has to break free from the institutions and conventions of the social world."[117]

Finally, let us offer some conclusions about the Taoist model of personhood. Unlike a Confucian model of personhood, where there is oneness with his family and clan and the larger moral order, a Taoist personhood enjoys a distinct demarcation of the private and the public dimensions of a person. The Taoist personhood frowns on the public dimensions of a person, and appreciates his innermost private dimension. Berling uses the analogy of an onion to describe the several layers of a Taoist personhood: "The most notable [layer] being the socialized self which is tied to an unquestionable acceptance of the conventional world and its institutions, and the core of an individual, the 'perfect self' who does conform to the order of reality characterized by labels and concepts, but who has achieved transcendence of the boundaries of past experience and even of common sense."[118]

Such a Taoist personhood has modern relevance. To substitute the word "autonomy," which has a distinct political connotation, Whitman uses the more neutral terms of "privacy" and "uniqueness" to denote the sanction of the private space of an individual implicit in Taoism. She notes, "privacy as freedom from control is valued because we see it as essential to the individual uniqueness which we understand to be essential to moral autonomy. Privacy permits individuals to think and do as they please - develop their own 'true' and 'unique' personalities. Our insistence that uniqueness is essential to autonomy assumes that the individual can and should exercise moral choice in a variety of different ways and that personal development should be guided by these

[117] Berling, "Self and Whole," 105.
[118] Ibid., 109.

choices rather than by what we consider to be externally imposed rules and expectations."[119] Whitman's comments help us see the modern relevance of a traditional Taoist model of personhood. To claim privacy and uniqueness, one necessarily declares a sequestered space of one's own, which is free from the imposition of the central leadership. More often than not, the presence of such private space is conducive to the growth of dissenting consciousness of "freedom," "moral autonomy," and "choice." This behavior often forms defiance.

Buddhism

Buddhism is believed to have first entered China as early as the first century A.D.[120] It became influential in the fourth century during the Han Dynasty.[121] Buddhism, as a philosophy that offers ultimate spiritual transcendence to humankind, is a comprehensive and complex belief and philosophical system. It is also a value system. For more than two thousand years in China, Buddhism has enjoyed lasting vitality. In ancient China, Buddhism has offered consolation to the Chinese common people. In the contemporary era, dissident movements such as Falungong have modernized the classical religion to suit their ends.

The end of the Han dynasty was succeeded by a century of internal struggle by short-lived Chinese Kingdoms, and the subsequent two and a half centuries unfolded with further turmoil. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the entire Yellow River basin, the home of the Chinese civilization, was completely overrun by invading hordes of Huns,

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[119] Whitman, "Privacy," 94.

[120] Feng Yu-lan, "Buddhism and Its Critics during the Period of Disunity," *A History of Chinese Philosophy,* 2:239.

[121] For detailed discussion on the rise of Buddhism in China, see C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society;*

Mongols, Tungusic, and Turkic tribes, who continuously preyed on each other and replaced each other in rapid succession. The displaced Chinese government led a feeble existence under the Jin dynasty (265-420 A.D.) in the Yangtze valley, ever threatened by impending barbarian attacks from the north and torn by dissension and demoralization from within. Life in the newly colonized south was haunted by constant dislocation and uncertainty. Thus, in the north and in the Chinese south, power and political fortunes were ephemeral and life was fraught with unexpected tragedies. The ruling class sank into cynical decadence. The intelligentsia was demoralized and bewildered, now that the Confucian doctrine, which had undergirded the Han order, could no longer offer guidance or enlightenment in the onrushing chaos. But the worst burden of the tragic age was borne by the common people, who as conscripts were pawns on the bloody battlefield and as civilians supplied *corvée labor* and paid exorbitant financial levies both for the endless wars and for the pleasure of the conquerors. In addition to the continuous destruction of life and property, the luckless common men were struck by a greater frequency of floods, drought, and other forms of natural calamities than in more stable periods of Chinese history.[122] From the second to the sixth century, as the years and decades rolled by, the people saw no relief from the unending procession of disasters, the dependability and orderliness of life which they had once experienced under Han rule seemed to have gone forever. In those years, people eagerly reached out for anything that suggested mental or material relief from their plight. It was against this background of

[122] Yang, Religion in Chinese Society, 115-116.

the structural and ideological breakdown of Chinese society that Buddhism, a foreign faith, made its inroad into China.[123]

The Basic Concepts of Buddhism

According to Feng Youlan, a prominent Chinese philosopher, Buddhism has four major tenets:

(1) From traditional Hindu thought, Buddhism accepts the theory of reincarnation. The deeds or *karma* of each sentient being in successive past existences determines what he is to be in existences still to come. These rebirths take place on several different levels: that of the beings in the various hells, of animals, of human beings, of the divine beings in the various heavens, etc. In their totality they constitute the wheel of life and death.[124]

(2) There has been no single act of divine creation that has produced this stream of existence. The wheel is permanent and unchanging in the sense that it goes on eternally. It is impermanent and changing, however, in the sense that everything in it is in a state of flux. This means that phenomenal "existence," as commonly perceived by the senses, is illusory; it is not real in as much as, thought it exists, its existence is not permanent or absolute. Nothing belonging to it has an enduring entity of "nature" of its own; everything is dependent upon a combination of fluctuating conditions and factors for its seeming "existence" at any given moment. This is the Buddhist theory of causation.[125]

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[123] Ibid., 116. Also see Arthur F. Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
[124] Feng, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 237.
[125] ibid., 237.

(3) It is a characteristic of human thinking that it abhors the impermanent and desires the permanent. Expressed in Buddhist terms, this takes the form of escaping from the inexorable and ever-continuing wheel of life and death, and gaining union with the ultimate unchanging reality that lies behind phenomenal existence. "All life is suffering." Such escape, however, can only be achieved by preventing the continued operation of the effects of previous *karma,* that is, by breaking the chain of causation. The resulting state of oneness with reality is that of *Nirvāna,* and the Buddhas ("enlightened ones") are those beings who belong to this state.[126]

(4) Escape or salvation is to be gained through enlightenment. In part it consists in the acquisition of religious merit through good deeds, but more important is a transcendent understanding or perception that can peer through the veil of illusion and see the reality behind. When this perception arises, the ties of false sensory discrimination and of the passions (greed, envy, etc.) are broken so that we are no longer carried along in the stream of phenomenal existence. Enlightenment, however, is more than a mere intellectual realization of the falseness of the universe as ordinarily perceived; to be genuine, it must consist of the intuitive experiencing of Truth with one's whole being – an act through which the experience becomes merges with that Truth.[127]

The early development of Buddhism was called Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle). It was heavily influenced by the traditional Buddhist teachings on the salvation of the individual. It was characterized by the Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle) school, which emphasized the salvation of the individual, expansion of the new religion into a major religious movement paralleled closely the growth of Mahayana (Greater Vehicle)

[126] Ibid., 237-238.
[127] Ibid., 238.

Buddhism, which advocated sympathy for all creatures and salvation for all humanity as the only possible means of achieving personal salvation. This emphasis on world salvation not only lifted Buddhism above the individual and magical levels but also enabled it to serve as the focus of a new spiritual orientation at a time when the Han order was disintegrating, when the people's faith in the celestial power of the classical religion and Confucianism was being shaken, and when a new faith was needed in the face of widespread social and economic misery. The transformation of Buddhism from a magical cult into a large-scale movement embracing all social classes depended partly on the development of this faith in its Mahayana form.[128]

Buddhism in many ways complements Taoism. As Arthur Wright notes, "[Traditional] Taoism had long exalted the virtues of withdrawal and contemplation, and the social and political instability of the [Chinese south during the South and North dynasties] encouraged escape from the frustrations of the world. Buddhism now provided a more highly sophisticated and aesthetically satisfying regimen for the meditative life, a richer and more diversified body of doctrine and philosophy, and a stronger ethical justification for such a life."[129]

As Buddhism entered China, it became a classical school of ethical thought; its practice of worshipping a deity was graduated to a secondary position. As Fang Litian, a professor of religion from China People's University, sees it, the fact that "Buddhism came to be the spiritual belief system of hundreds and millions of Chinese" demonstrates

[128] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 119.
[129] Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, 12-13.

"the lasting vitality and eternal value of Buddhism, for it fits the need of the Chinese people and society."[130]

The belief of equality is one of the important principles of Buddhist ethical thought in China. Buddhism emphasizes equality among humans, opposes the division of nobility and humility according to ethnicity and class, and upholds the belief that one's accomplishment should be measured by his/her attainment of virtue and wisdom.[131] Self-restraint accounts for the second ethical principle of Buddhism. By self-restraint, it refers to the restraint of one's desire, deeds, and conscience. Buddhism demands believers refrain their cravings for riches, power, position, and fame. The Buddhist value of self-restraint plays a role in influencing the moral behavior of people in contemporary East Asia, according to Yao Weiqun, a professor of philosophy from Beijing University. As he points out, Buddhist ethical thought "exhorts people to practice self-restraint, and opposes the attainment of self-interest at the expense of others. For curbing egoism and hedonism in contemporary society, the unique role Buddhism plays cannot be replaced by other cultural traditions."[132]

The most powerful appeal of Buddhism is perhaps its call for transcendence of human life. "The Buddhist thought on transcendence" as argued by Fang Litian, "seeks to go beyond the meaning of human life. It is an advancement of human spiritual realm. It helps an individual to reflect his/her life experience with an objective and detached manner, and realizes his/her faults. It produces multiple functions of tranquility, support,

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[130] Fang Litian, "Zhongguo fojiaxue de xiandai jiazhi"[The Modern Value of the Chinese Buddhist Philosophy], *Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Xuebao* [The Academic Journal of China People's University], no. 4 (2002): 31-33.

[131] Ibid., 35.

[132] Yao Weiqun, "Buddhist Ethical Thought and Modern Society," *Journal of Peking University* (Humanities and Social Sciences Issue), no. 3 (1999): 89.

adjustment, amelioration and inspiration in human psychology. It eases or even erases believers' helplessness, anxiety, frustration, loss and pain."[133]

While Buddhism in China emphasizes "self-efforts" to transcendence, it stresses altruism. Transcendence to a higher spiritual plane should not be an individual effort; but should be carried out with the accompaniment of spiritual awakening of others.[134] As a Buddhist saying points out, "When one does ten charitable deeds, one is enlivened; when a family does ten charitable deeds, the family attains happiness; when a country does ten charitable deeds, the country gains stability; and when the world does ten charitable deeds, the world achieves peace." The wide spread of religious influence of Buddhism comes precisely from its accentuation on linking the salvation of an individual with that of the secular world.

The contextual study of the three Chinese classical religions tradition has provided us with an understanding of what constitutes the core value of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. These classical systems shaped Chinese political and cultural history. A basic knowledge of these traditions will help us to decipher the contemporary political and cultural behaviors of both the Chinese government and the Falungong movement.

The Chinese communist government has largely inherited the authoritarian aspects of Confucianism. It continues the Confucian values of putting the interest of the collectivity before that of the individual, forestalling personal growth, and calling on people to engage in uniform social behavior. The Chinese leadership also finds

[133] Fang Litan, "Zhongguo foxiaoxue," 37.
[134] Ibid., 36.

consistence in the Confucian rationalistic nature, and borrows from it to mold the communist "superman," who is selfless, conformative, and subjugating.

The Falungong movement has continued the Taoist and Buddhism traditions. First and foremost, Falungong carries forward the Taoist and Buddhist value of putting emphasis on trans-rational intuition by prioritizing human sentiment, feeling, and well-fare. Like Taoism and Buddhism, Falungong is a popular religion common people turn to in times of need as it aims to bring them consolation and support. More significantly, Falungong endeavors to extend the long lasting validity of Taoism and Buddhism by maintaining their modern relevance. Its efforts include upholding the traditional moral appeal to reverse the contemporary social ills of the Chinese society, and developing a private space where members can clamor for autonomy, choice, and resistance.

The chapter will end with a review of the history and significance of White Lotus Sect. White Lotus provides a precedent and a useful analogy to the political-religious nature of Falungong. For like Falungong, White Lotus drew Buddhist beliefs as its core ideology. Though they occurred in different historical periods, White Lotus and Falungong share similarities in 1) cause of occurrence, 2) social setting, 3) constitution of membership, and 4) religious teachings.

White Lotus and Falungong

The Social Setting of White Lotus Sect

White Lotus first emerged in the sixteenth century but became a formidable religious movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century China in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). In the late eighteenth century, the Qing government was showing

protracted signs of dynastic collapse. These signs of weakness included: domination of the center by court favorites, waste and corruption, ineffective and oppressive local government, and military incompetence. Extravagance and irresponsibility among the rich seemed to parallel impoverishment among the poor.[135]

Economic hardship and disaster have constituted a frequent type of crisis that has bred religious movements and rebellions throughout Chinese history. Famine due to crop failure was recurrent in such an agricultural society, leading to many forms of mass action. As C. K. Yang notes, "We may say that no major politicoreligious upheaval in Chinese history was without some form of extensive agricultural crisis as a backdrop."[136]

In addition to economic difficulties, another factor that led to the rise of White Lotus was persecution by an authoritarian government. Persecution could provoke a purely religious organization into armed resistance, when it felt threatened with extermination. In the nineteenth century, White Lotus led numerous peasant uprisings that spread to five provinces and lasted for nine years. At its height, several hundred thousand people joined armed resistance led by White Lotus.[137]

We cannot understand the sociopolitical significance of a religious movement without learning the composition of its membership. Only by doing so can one comprehend why a religious group, which, in ordinary circumstances, recites rosaries and reads sutras, and which upholds virtue and does good deeds, will pick up weapons and to engage in rebellions against the government.

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[135] Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 217.

[136] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 225.

[137] Wang Zhaoxiang, *Baolianjia Tanao* [A Sursey of White Lotus Sect] (Xian: Shangxi renmin chubanshe,1993).

Almost all the founders of different sects of White Lotus came from the lower rungs of the social ladder, some even from quite impoverished backgrounds. Peng Yingyu, a head of White Lotus in southern China, came from a poor peasant family. Han Shantong, the leader of White Lotus in northern China during the late Yuan Dynasty, was the descendant of demoted court officials. The founder of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, had started his career path as a believer of White Lotus. He had to become a monk since his family could not support him.[138] Because the leaders of White Lotus came from such humble backgrounds, they were able to establish bonds and identity with the common people. They took up the occupation of country doctors, priests, or tradesman to visit townships or countryside to mobilize the masses.

Besides the sect leaders, the members of White Lotus also came from the lower rungs of society. Most were peasants, craftsmen, the urban poor, monks and priests, migrants, miners, and sailors.[139] Depending on the geographic location and period of time, White Lotus attracted different groups. For example, Luo Jiao, a sectarian branch of White Lotus, was mainly active along the Grand Canal in Heibei, Shangdong, Henan, Anhui, and Zhejiang. Hence, its believers tended to be old, sick, disabled sailors who had to make a living by operating boats along the Grand Canal.[140] The White Lotus Uprising in Jiajing Era (1796) that spread to Sichuan and Hubei five provinces mainly attracted migrant peasants.[141]

One of the main reasons why the poor joined White Lotus was the economic exploitation and political oppression by the ruling class. Faced with harsh living

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[138] To learn more about the biographic information on the founders of White Lotus sect, read Wang, *A Survey of White Lotus*, 116-117.
[139] Ibid., 118.
[140] Ibid., 118.
[141] Ibid., 118-119.

conditions, the common people were desperate to change their individual fate. When official political institutions were impotent, when common people saw no way out, they turned to supernatural power for their spiritual support. On the rise of White Lotus, as Wang Zhaoxiang argues, "religion is a social historical phenomenon. It represents a mindset of human social consciousness. When [common people] cannot change their own fate, religion becomes self-consciousness and self-awareness; it provides the spiritual haven and natural support for them to seek supernatural strength."[142] Wang's remarks make clear why religion can become a tool or a means for survival. It provides lenses to view reality differently. It can be a beacon to provide hope. "The beacon of hope comes from the unique ability of religion to teach members to focus their attention on a lasting spiritual symbol," Yang writes, "the truth of which does not hinge on individual circumstance. Religion is thus vital because it is independent of ever-changing utilitarian interests."[143]

The experiences of White Lotus demonstrate why religion could serve so well as a group integrating force: a spiritual orientation furnishes the symbol of a social or political cause, thereby lifting the attention of the group above the clash of varying utilitarian interests and focusing their views on a higher plane.[144] Echoing the same sentiment, Georg Simmel points out the reason why religion could rally believers into action. He says,

> One of the great intellectual achievements of religion is that it draws together the vast spectrum of human ideas and concerns and concentrates them into single,

[142] Ibid., 115
[143] Yang, Religion in Chinese Society, 243.
[144] Ibid., 242.

> unified concepts; unlike those of philosophy, these concepts are not abstract but rather possess the full vitality of being themselves in their immediacy and inner tangibility. Sanctification – beyond attainment through individual actions, and yet not a pale abstraction like so many purely moral ideals, arousing the soul in all its passion, like a call exhorting the prisoner to break his chains.[145]

Both Yang and Simmel answer the question many of us have: why is religion so powerful in mobilizing believers. Part of the answer is that it connects the conceptual and spiritual to the motivational. Religion performs a morally uplifting function because it holds out concrete and idealized images for people trapped in dire situations. Believers are liberated from their obsessions with their negative personal lot to strive for a higher goal. When people believe there is hope they grow the wish to live and fight. This point may also explain the force of tenacity religious believers possess when faced with violent persecution and suppression.

White Lotus used Buddhist theology as the core of its doctrines. It preached that the Limitless Ultimate (*wu ji*) created Heaven and Earth and all things in the universe. The universe operated on *kalpas* or cosmic aeons of 129,600 years each. In each *kalpa* there would be several calamities caused by changes in the heavenly forces. Since the creation of Heaven, there had been three *kalpas.* The first was known as the Blue Yang (Blue Sun) *kalpa.* The second was the Red Yang (Red Sun) *kalpa.* The third was the White Yang (White Sun) *kalpa.* Now the next-to-the-last *kalpa* had ended and the last *kalpa* was about to begin.

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[145] Georg Simmel, *Essays on Religion,* ed. and trans. Horst Jürgen Helle et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 29.

In the period of Blue Yang, the Lamplighting Buddha controlled the universe. In the period of Red Yang, the Sakya Buddha controlled the universe. In period of the White Yang, the Maitreya Buddha would be in control. In each *kalpa,* both the Tao (Way) and calamity were sent down to the world. The Tao was for saving the good and the believers; calamity was for exterminating the evil. When the Tao predominated, calamity would disappear. Calamity came by men's evil conduct, and the Tao was sent down because of it.[146] Both the Lamplighting Buddha and the Sakya had not had been effective in saving the humankind, and so the Unbegotten Mother had sent down the Maitreya Buddha to save it. In summary, the core of White Lotus centers on the creation of Heaven and Earth, the last *kalpa* and salvation of humanity by the Maitreya Buddha.[147]

It was not mere coincidence that the timing of Chinese religious movements promulgating salvational messages usually corresponded with the occurrence of natural and man-made calamities. For example, during the period of the late Ming Dynasty, there were droughts, plagues of locusts, pestilence, and social disorder that caused extreme suffering. It was then that White Lotus leaders claimed that the last *kalpa* was about to arrive.[148] The timely religious appeal of their preaching was immense.

While salvational propositions were the fundamental motivating force behind religious movements, it was prophecy that became the focus of public attention and thereby attracted a following. By attaching the salvational cause to momentous events of the world in the past, present, and future, prophecy gave realism and vividness to the whole movement. Prophecy thrived during crises, and according to available records, every major critical period in Chinese history was attended by the rise of some form of

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[146] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society,* 234-235.
[147] Wang Zhaoxiang, *A Survey of White Lotus*, 133.
[148] Ibid., 141.

prophecy. Typical of a crisis were the mass psychological feelings of insecurity, the expectancy of impending disaster, and the uncertainty of what was ahead. As masses of troubled men scanned the horizon for an explanation of their plight and for deliverance from their suffering, prophecy answered them with momentous words of wisdom uttered not by men but by gods.[149]

Conclusion

Both White Lotus and Falungong happened against a similar social backdrop – a time of crisis. For White Lotus, the religious movement became most active when the Qing government showed increasing weakness and corruption and when natural disasters such as drought, famine and epidemic diseases were severe. In a similar vein, sociological and cultural factors contribute to the origin of Falungong. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the rise of Falungong was triggered by the appearance of a vast number of disadvantaged socioeconomic groups because of the drastic introduction of market economy, and the inability of the Chinese leadership to adopt appropriate measures to relieve their plight. In this regard, like White Lotus, Falungong has risen as a religious salvational group to offer support and condolence to the masses when the political institutions cannot meet their needs.

Like White Lotus, because of its religious appeal, Falungong has attracted mainly Chinese from the lower rungs of society. The majority of Falungong members are blue-collar workers, peasants, the elderly, and the sick. Similar to White Lotus, these people join Falungong because it meets their spiritual, psychological, and physiological needs. It is fair to say here that none of the members of White Lotus and Falungong started out

[149] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 232-233.

as the open enemies of the official establishment. It is only when the government persecuted them violently that they became rebellious, and a purely religious movement assumes a political nature.

The religious teachings of Falungong share similarities with those of White Lotus. As mentioned previously, the core of teachings of White Lotus is on the last *kalpa* and the descending of Maitreya Buddha to the world to save humankind. The White Lotus leaders always emphasize to their followers the inevitable occurrences of natural calamities such as fire, flood and tornadoes before the arrival of theWestern Paradise.[150] The intent of such actions could be perceived as strengthening the psychological endurance of believers in times of extreme difficulties and instilling in them strong optimism.

The Gnostic nature of the teachings of White Lotus –a belief that secret knowledge could secure release for the soul from imprisonment in the material body - is also present in those of Falungong. Consider Li Hongzhi's theory of *Zhuan Fa Lun*: the explosion of the universe. According to Li:

> Some people say: 'While a Tao is one foot tall, a demon would be one yard high.' This is a false statement made by street people. A demon will never be higher than a Tao… Every time our universe goes through a period of a great many years, it always experiences a great catastrophe that will destroy everything in the universe, including planets and all lives… Every time this situation occurs, the characteristics and all the matters inside the previous universe must be blown up. After the new universe is reconstructed by the great-enlightened beings at an

[150] Ibid., 133.

> extremely high level, there are still some that survive the explosion. The great enlightened beings build the universe according to their own characteristics and standards.[151]

In this long passage, one notices stark similarities to the religious teachings of White Lotus: both teachings predict the arrival of calamities that are to entirely eradicate "this world," and express the optimistic view that all the evil will disappear along with the calamities. The tone is affirmative and resolute. For believers who feel desperate and helpless, passages as powerful and vivid like this one, issued by a revered authoritative figure, lend powerful force to followers. For them, it is hard not to feel heartened.

The discussion of White Lotus shows that however unique and exigent a popular religious movement may be, it cannot escape the overreaching influence of the three dominant Chinese religious systems – Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. These philosophical and religious traditions provide the backdrop for the movement to occur, and influence the moral behavior of members. For example, the Buddhist theology of human salvation informed the moral tenets of White Lotus. Even though it occurred in late twentieth century China, the Falungong Movement also resorted to tradition - Taoism and Buddhism – as its ideological foundation. Falungong's discourse of exile and return, of world creation, degeneration, and salvation and renewal draws heavily on Buddhist and Taoist thoughts. But equally important, Falungong assimilated Taoism and Buddhism because the classical religious thoughts put primary emphasis on the welfare of human beings, which is quite compatible with Falungong's beliefs. In this regard,

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[151] For extended discussion on the explosion of the universe, see Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun* (English Version), 3rd ed. (Taiwan: Universe Publishing Company, 2000), 191-193.

Confucianism, which the establishment often upholds, forms an antithesis as it promotes social hierarchy and subjugation of the individual to the cause of the state. The focus of the following discussion is on how these religious traditions view the relationship of an individual with his/her social environment.

Chapter Three:
Use the Ancient to Serve the Modern:
The Use of Tradition in Contemporary Social Context

In the discussion in chapter two of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, we learned that the three ancient traditions are ethical systems rather than pure religious systems, and that they are all first and foremost concerned with the issue of human morality. For Buddhism and Confucianism in particular, "they already transcend" the demarcation of "primitive and natural religions." For them, "ethics and morality play a crucial role, and worship of deities have become secondary."[152] Unlike traditional religions in the West, which emphasize the interrelationship between God and man, the Chinese ancient traditions focus mainly on man, his ethical behavior, and the effects of his ethical behavior on the social world. While a man is the product of the social environment, his behavior influences the social reality. The aim of all three classical systems is to prescribe moral guidelines for man to follow.

In the contemporary era, the three classical ethical systems are given prominence again by social actors. Both Falungong and Chinese leadership view such systems as useful tools to deal with the moral decline of contemporary Chinese society. The core of the three ancient systems – becoming spiritual and virtuous – is reintroduced in the contemporary context in an effort to reform and reshape people by channeling their behavior under the guidance of traditional mores. On this thought, the religious leader Li Hongzhi and Chinese current leaders converge.

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152 Huang Xiaoshi, "Fojiao rujiao lunli daode jianlun" [A Brief Discussion on the Ethics of Buddhism and Confucianism] *Sichuan daxue xuebao* [Journal of Sichuan University], no. 2 (1998):100.

However, Falungong's Li Hongzhi and the Chinese leadership differ fundamentally on how tradition is to be used. Li Hongzhi inherits tradition to suit his contemporary political and moral purposes. His revival of tradition is to offer an alternative blueprint of the current society and is meant as a social critique of the central leadership. Li Hongzhi promotes the spiritual transcendence of individuals, and holds that an orderly society starts from a virtuous individual social member. He believes that common people, rather than the government, are the agents of change. Li Hongzhi's thoughts thus form a challenge to the legitimacy of the government. Contrary to the government, Li Hongzhi recalls Taoism and Buddhism, the popular ethical thinking of the three classical traditions.

In contrast, the Chinese leadership uses tradition to safeguard its legitimacy, and to provide a rationale for its authoritarian rule. For example, the establishment upholds the traditional values of obedience and conformity, and insists social order depend on the subjugation of common people. The aim of the leadership is to continue the status quo in China, and resist any attempts at political reform. In this regard, the Chinese leadership inherits Confucianism, the most conservative of the three classical traditions.

Falungong's Recall of Taoism and Buddhism

Falungong sees the usefulness of tradition to deal with problems of the contemporary Chinese society. Li Hongzhi holds that classical ethical thinking should be reintroduced in contemporary context to reverse the moral decline. Yet, contrary to communist theoreticians, Li Hongzhi adopts Taoism and Buddhism, the rivals of Confucianism, and uses them as the theoretical basis of Falungong's ethical tenets. Li

Hongzhi's selection of Taoism and Buddhism aims to serve the interest of the populace, as these two classical traditions have been popular ethical thoughts in the Chinese history.

Li Hongzhi has a political agenda in his revival of tradition. He endeavors to deligitimatize the official social plan by offering an alternative social blue print. His projection of an ideal world is based on traditional ideals where the common people are free from oppression and enjoy equality and happiness. Li Hongzhi's use of tradition also has a practical consideration: he attempts to add authenticity to a popular religious movement that is emergent in the political scene of Chinese politics. By relying on the weight and credibility of tradition, he hopes to push his movement from a peripheral status to the center of political stage.

Like his Taoist and Buddhist forebears, Li Hongzhi's highest concern is the decline of human integrity. To him, all social problems rise from to the corruption of human moral character. As he says in a passage called "Recreate Humankind": "Human selfishness, greed, stupidity and ignorance are intertwined with his kindheartedness… As social problems are occurring repeatedly, which leads to crisis, humans fail to find the cause within themselves. Human hearts that fail to see the corruption of moral virtue are the poisonous source of all the social problems."[153]

He points out the solution to this issue: "The universe will give human beings one more chance. Let the great *fofa* (Falungong teachings) create the true reality in the human world. Let it get rid of all the filth and ignorance."[154] This passage by Li Hongzhi on human degradation and its opportunity for a rebirth appears to be heavily influenced by the religious teachings of White Lotus. White Lotus preached the belief that humans

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[153] Li Hongzhi, *Falun fofa,* (Hong Kong: Falun Fofa Publishing House, 1998), 102.
[154] Ibid.,103

have sunk to immorality, and the Maitreya Buddha will lift humans from moral corruption to a reality where morality prevails. Though he inherits the ancient teachings of White Lotus, Li Hongzhi instills the teachings with modern connotation. He intends his teachings to be reality based, as he contends that his Falungong teachings, rather than the supernatural religious figures, will help people achieve morality again. More significantly, unlike traditional religious teachings such as Taoism, Buddhism, and White Lotus, which all emphasize other worldliness, Li Hongzhi has a focus on this world. He endeavors to offer an alternative social plan as a solution to solve the social problems of the contemporary Chinese society.

Li Hongzhi's writings are replete with use of rhetorical strategies. Two notable rhetorical strategies he uses consistently are substitution (of supernatural religious figures with modern characters), and allusion. Of the first rhetorical strategy, we can use the immediate above quoted passage as an example. For a reader who is not familiar with Chinese religious history, the passage seems like Li Hongzhi's original thought. Yet for anyone who is versed in Chinese religion, he/she discerns that the argument that universe can give human beings one more chance is lifted from the afore mentioned religious teachings of White Lotus on the third kalpa and salvation of humanity by the Maitreya Buddha. Here Li Hongzhi simply substitutes his own Falungong for the salvational role of the Maitreya Buddha. The rhetorical strategy of substitution has been vastly successful for Li Hongzhi. His practitioners revere him as an effective religious leader. By using the same religious texts but replacing religious supernatural beings with Falungong, he strikes a powerful chord in his faithful believers.

The second rhetorical strategy he uses is allusion. Throughout his writings in *Zhuan Fa Lun,* Li Hongzhi speaks of religious phenomena to allude to the current Chinese society. The best example perhaps is his theory about the explosion of universe. By arguing that when demons get too powerful, a natural catastrophe will occur to destroy all but the great-enlightened beings, he is really expressing his wrath at the irreversible deterioration of the current society under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. He is hopeful that China will one day become a good society again. Li Hongzhi uses allusions frequently in his writings. He never overtly criticizes the Chinese leadership. Utilizing his expertise to speak in esoteric religious and classical terms, he is much more effective at accomplishing his goal of critiquing current affairs and mobilizing his believers.

Like all classical and contemporary Chinese philosophers, thinkers, and religious leaders, Li Hongzhi sees the morality playing an essential role in the prosperity of a society. As he notes, "If humans do not have virtue, natural calamity and man-made crises will occur. If the earth does not have virtue, all living things will wither. If the heaven does not have *Tao*, earth will crack and sky will cave in. When Law is upheld, the universe is straight, and all life will be vital and vigorous. When heaven and earth are strengthened, Law will last forever."[155] Metaphor is another rhetorical strategy Li Hongzhi uses repeatedly. Since most of his believers are not well educated, the evocation of vivid images are much more powerful than erudite words.

Unlike his communist rivals who insist on a revival of Confucian morality, Li Hongzhi endeavors to promote the moral virtues of Taoism and Buddhism. He claims that Falungong incorporates the two traditions as its main ideological foundation. In

[155] Li Hongzhi, *Falun fofa*, 26.

particular, his view on morality is heavily influenced by Taoist beliefs. For example, on the cultivation of ethical behavior, a term he used consistently is "let go the heart of an 'ordinary person' (*changren*)." In *Zhuan Fa Lun,* he explains how this is achieved: "Let me tell you the truth: the entire cultivation process for a practitioner is one of constantly giving up human attachments. In ordinary human society, people compete with, deceive and harm each other for a little personal gain. All of these mentalities must be given up."[156] In another instance, Li is even more specific when he names "fame, money, sexual lust and kinship" as the "taboo of practitioners."[157] Li's notion of stopping being an "ordinary person" and abstention of human desires is inspired by classical Taoist beliefs. If we refresh our memory about the discussion on Taoism in the previous chapter, we are reminded that Taoism upholds a philosophy of giving up human attachments in order to reach a spiritual transcendence. Maria Hsia Chang summarizes Taoist teachings well: "the Daoists recommended the detachment of the self, emotionally if not physically from human intercourse and society. All values were artificial: one should prize neither oneself, nor honors, nor friends, masters, and kin… true wisdom consisted in emptying one's heart and mind of every idea and sentiment. The sage lived in retreat by avoiding all human attachments – those of love, lust, fame, fortune, popularity and success."[158] Here, we see the moral virtue Li promotes shares stark similarities with the classical Taoist beliefs. Yet, it is important to note that, once again, Li inherits tradition in a "reflective" manner as he adds contemporary relevance in his own teachings. Unlike classical Taoists who discard human attachments to reach a

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[156] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan fa lun* [The Turning Wheel of the Law] (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1996), 2.
[157] Li Hongzhi, *Falun fofa,* 49.
[158] Maria Hsia Chang, *Falungong: the End of Days* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 40.

negative nihilistic state, Li sees morality as a forceful weapon to bring about constructive changes to contemporary human society.

Dissimilar to his communist rivals who stress social engineering and external pressure to enforce moral behavior in the people, Li insists on self effort of an individual to reform himself/herself. One of the central themes in his moral teachings is "cultivate the inner to stabilize the outer" (*xiunei er anwai).*[159] Here, by "inner" and "outer," he refers to the inner world of an individual and the outer social society. In other words, he argues that individual moral behavior of all societal members leads to an orderly society. Here, too, he appears to be influenced by Buddhist beliefs. "Buddhism emphasizes 'self effort' (*zili*), namely, to rely on self-awakening, virtue and wisdom to reach transcendence," Fang Litian observes, "At the same time, [Buddhist] stresses to reach transcendence is not an isolated act; it is not an individual matter. Only when self-awakening is accomplished with the awakening with others can the transcendence be real"[160] By the slogan of self-efforts, Li Hongzhi articulates an alternative solution for a stable society. His approach contrastas with that of the communist thinkers who advocate evasive official social control to bring about moral behavior in the common people. Here, Li Hongzhi criticizes indirectly the use of coercion by the government to implement morality in the Chinese people.

Governmental Revival of Confucianism

The Chinese leadership has been opportunistic in its use of Confucianism. To suit the particular political needs of a historical period, the leadership can commend or

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[159] Li Hongzhi, *Falun fofa,* 35.

[160] Fang Litian, "Zhongguo fojiaxue de xiandai jiazhi" [The Modern Value of the Chinese Buddhist Philosophy] *Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Xuebao,* no, 4 (2002): 36.

denounce Confucianism as it sees fit. For example, since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, every leader including Mao, had opposed Confucianism. They produced the well-known slogan "destroy the Confucian shop," meaning Confucius, as an icon of Chinese cultural tradition, should be dismantled. They called for a disinheritance of Confucianism because it represented the feudalistic order as they claimed to be the new agents of history. Communist China was supposed to be a new chapter in the long Chinese tradition.

Things were to change in recent years. Since Jiang Zemin came to power, the Chinese leadership has been facing a serious legitimacy crisis. The 1989 student protest in Tiananmen Square greatly shook the political grip of the leadership on Chinese society. The leadership now sees the need to resuscitate Confucianism as Confucius has always championed the cause of the ruling class. It is no coincidence that in December 1989, the same year when student protests happened, Chinese leaders called for a solemn celebration of the birthday of Confucius. A large-scale international symposium on the historical and modern role of Confucianism was held in Beijing where scholars from twenty-five countries attended. Jiang Zemin was present at the symposium and delivered a speech. In 1993, under official sponsorship, Beijing Universities set up a research institute to study *guo xue* (national study), where two hundred scholars from Beijing University regularly presented their works on various ancient scholars, most notably Confucius. The renewed interest in tradition, in Confucianism in particular, suggests that Chinese leadership has a motive behind all the fanfare on Confucius. As Adrian Chan, author of *Chinese Marxism*, explains, "The [Confucian] ideal is 'Let the ruler be a ruler, the subjects a subject, the fathers a father and the sons a son.' It is almost an ideal

ideology for those in command, and those seeking legitimation. As it brooks no disharmony, and therefore no deviation from, or opposition to the orthodoxy, [Confucianism] is an ideal legitimizing ideology to a ruler who is powerful but of dubious legitimacy."[161] Liu Sanfu, is even more specific on the perceived beneficial value for the Chinese leadership. As he notes, "The [Confucian] thought directly serves the interests of the ruling class. It not only becomes a hegemonic ideology, but also evolves into a concrete political system. It is conducive to strengthening the social and ideological foundation of an authoritarian leadership."[162]

Jiang Zemin and other Chinese leaders are straightforward in their praise of Confucius. As Jiang says, "Confucius was one of China's great thinkers, and his doctrine is part of China's invaluable cultural heritage. We must thoroughly study his fine ideals and carry them to the future."[163] Gu Mu, a senior CCP leader is in full agreement. As he declares, "Confucius was a great thinker, educator, and a politician of ... noble character, learned and held in high regard."[164] Under the official auspice, Chinese theoreticians and academicians surged forward to promote Confucianism. Bu Jinzhi, a research fellow from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the Confucian concept of virtue ingrained in the Chinese nation a spirit of selfless.[165] Cai Fanglu, a research fellow at the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, spoke about Confucius' influence on modern society. According to him, the Confucian ideas of "regarding loyalty as superior to profit" and of "paying regard to public interest and despising the pursuit of self-interest"

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[161] Adrian Chan, *Chinese Marxism,* (London: Continuum, 2003), 195.

[162] Liu Sanfu, "Rujiao daode tixi yu shidai wenhua jingsheng de jiazhi zhuowei" [Malposition between Confucian Ethical System and Contemporary Cultural Spirit] *Jilin daxue shehui kexue xuebao,* no. 3 (1995): 58.

[163] "Confucianism: Still A Matter of Interest," *Beijing Review* 32, (1989): 18.

[164] Ibid., 18.

[165] Ibid., 18.

fostered the growth of many idealistic communists.[166] Cai Fanglu sees a link between Confucianism and Communist leadership: proletarian revolutionaries and thinkers represented by Mao Zedong transformed Confucian value of self-sacrifice and made it suit the political needs of a particular historical period.[167] There is a common theme in the remarks of these theoreticians. Only the Confucian values that are conducive to an authoritarian rule are selected and celebrated.

Among these apologists of the Chinese leadership are two influential theoreticians, Zhang Dainian, a former philosopher from Beijing University, and He Xin, a self-claimed Marxist theoretician with close ties to the senior Chinese leaders. The background of Zhang Dainian and He Xin warrants our attention. Zhang Dainian had been an orthodox theoretician since his youth. In recent years, he was noted for always saying the "right thing" at the "right time." As a review of his complete works reveals, he adapted his position in his writing to suit the particular political needs of a historical period. Since the government's decision to revive Confucianism, he had appeared on numerous public occasions all over China to sing a praise of Confucius. *People's Daily* and many other influential Chinese publications had carried his writings on the revival of Confucianism. While Zhang Dainian targeted his speeches and writings to a domestic audience, He Xin has become the so-called "unofficial" spokesman for the government. He has met with foreign reporters from major American and European newspapers and news agencies, including Associated Press, Reuters, NHK, and *New York Times.* The following rhetorical analysis focuses on articles from *The Complete Works of Zhang Dainian* and recent monographs by He Xin, *On Chinese History and National*

[166] Ibid., 22.
[167] Ibid., 22.

Conscience and *Reflection: My Views on Philosophy and Religion* to illustrate how these have provided a theoretical basis and rationale for the revival of Confucianism for the Chinese government.

The first attempt Zhang Dainian and He Xin make is to revise the imperial history of China. They both contend that this history of China should be viewed as a progressive one, in which an advanced ideological foundation – Confucianism - has sustained Chinese civilization, and in which the ruling class – imperial emperors – have played vital roles. Here, it is important to note that it is a prominent rhetorical strategy for communist theoreticians to rewrite history to suit their modern political needs. Historical facts are twisted and historical figures are commended or denounced so that an organic link is established between the ancient and the modern to augment the positive traits of Chinese communist leadership. For example, the Chinese Communist Party has rewritten the history of the Anti-Japanese War so that the Chinese Communist Party is depicted as the sole political force to resist the Japanese invasion. The role Kuomingdang, the opposition party to the Chinese Communist Party, played in the war is entirely eliminated.

Here, the same rhetorical strategy is played again. The communist rhetoricians rewrite the imperial history so as to sing the praise of communist leadership in their subsequent arguments. According to Zhang Dainian,

> Since the Chinese civilization continued for 5,000 years, it must have had an ideological foundation, and it must have had a spiritual support system that made it possible for it to sustain for a long time. I just want to mention one thing:

> China in the past had a tradition of moral virtue that substituted a religious belief. This tradition affirms the high value of spiritual life and significance of independent human character. It had been conducive to form a spirit of nationalism that supported national independence and national culture.[168]

Zhang Dainian here plays the role of a revisionist. He is among the few Chinese who hold that the Chinese imperial history is an enlightened one. It is common knowledge to all Chinese that the imperial Chinese history has been a backward one, in which the feudalistic system suffocated the normal development of the national character of the Chinese people. Because of this a bourgeoisie was never able to develop in China. But by giving the Chinese imperial history a positive label, Zhang Dainian attempts to lay down a theoretical basis for his subsequent rhetoric to affirm the role of the Chinese communist leadership.

He Xin supports Zhang Dainian's argument. Like Zhang, he calls for a reevaluation of Chinese imperial history. But he is much more blatant in applauding the ruling class: "Some people criticize Chinese history as lacking freedom and democracy. As a result, except for a few peasant uprisings and three creations (paper, gunpowder and printing - author), Chinese history was accused of being ugly and dark. The competent and ambitious emperors were not mentioned. All emperors were labeled as 'feudal despotic tyrants' … Let's reevaluate our history. History is our nation's glory. History is our nation's pride.[169] In another instance, He Xin is even more explicit. He contends that

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[168] Zhang Dainian, "Reflection on Traditional Culture," *Complete Works of Zhang Dainian* 7 vols. (Hongkang: Man's Book Company), 6:154.
[169] He Xin, *Lun zhongguo lishi yu guomin yishi* [On Chinese History and National Consciousness] (Beijing: Shishi chuban she, 2002), 4.

"the ruling class," not "peasants," forms "the leading and decisive political force" that pushed Chinese history forward.[170] He Xin's argument reveals his general view about the ruling class and common people: the ruling class – the emperors are the heroes, whereas the masses are of no consequence. Here, we should pay attention to the timing when Zhang Dainian and He Xin call for a reevaluation of Chinese imperial history and when they applaud the role of emperors. The introduction of economic reform since 1978 saw a time when the Chinese leadership was facing an increasing challenge to its legitimacy. For example, theoretical and artistic circles experienced considerable spiritual liberalization. Social unrest from other segments of the Chinese society also began to emerge and has been gaining momentum, the most typical example of which had been the Falungong movement. By reinstating imperial emperors, Zhang Dainian and He Xin are actually affirming the modern role of the Chinese leadership. When they applaud the historical roles of ancient emperors, they are asserting the superiority of the modern ruling class – the Chinese communist leadership.

Here, we observe another prominent rhetorical strategy Chinese theoreticians often use. When they applaud or denounce historical figures, they are really alluding to modern characters. The most famous example of the use of this rhetorical strategy in the political history of Chinese Communist Party is the case of Wu Han and "Hai Rui Dismissal from Office," the historical play he wrote. Wu Han (1909-1967) was a well-known Chinese historian. In the later part of his life, especially after 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party took over China, he became interested in Hai Rui (1514-1587), a court official in Qing Dynasty known for his outspokenness and his hate of corrupt imperial officials. In 1960, on the eve of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China, Wu Han

[170] Ibid., 13.

wrote a historical play in which Hai Rui dealt severe punishment to tyrannical rich peasants and forced them to return farmland to poor peasants. Hai Rui was dismissed from his office by the imperial court for what he did. What was unusual about Wu Han's play was that his play was not faithful to the historical facts. While he downplayed the nature of the historical reformism of the plot, Wu Han accentuated the theme of winning victories for the underrepresented. Wu Han's play was published as a monograph and was staged by a prominent theatre troupe in Beijing.[171] (Here, it is important to note that the publication of Wu's play in 1961 coincided with an ideological trend in the Chinese society at the time. Chinese academicians and artists expressed concern that the Chinese Communist Party was monopolizing the ideological front, and it should share the political stage with other social forces).

Wu Han was to get himself into deep political trouble in a few years. On November 10, 1965, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Yao Wenyuan, a senior communist theoretician, wrote an article entitled "On the New Historical Play 'Hai Rui's Dismissal from Office'" in *Wen Hui Bao,* a daily newspaper from Shanghai. Yao condemned the play as a piece of poisonous grass, a political metaphor Chinese leadership commonly often uses to refer to a literary work that it disapproves.[172] Yao Wenyuan's denouncement of Wu Han's play was reprinted by sixteenth Chinese national and regional newspapers, which marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Among them, "the editor's note" in the *PLA Daily* revealed what constituted the true crime of Wu Han. According to the newspaper, "the playwright [Wu Han] twisted historical facts and 'used the ancient to allude the modern' to embellish the feudal ruling

[171] Li Youning, *Wuhan Zhuan* [A Biography of Wu Han] (Hongkang: Mingbao yuekan chubanshe, 1973), 85-6.
[172] Ibid., 87.

class, and promulgate the theory of not wanting a revolution."[173] The case of Wu Han was to become a famous political case noted for the rhetorical strategy of using the ancient to allude to the modern.

With the use of same rhetorical strategy, Zhang Dainian and He Xin have successfully established the supremacy of the Chinese leadership. They then proceed to promote Confucianism - the strain of traditional moral virtues that had facilitated the governance of the ruling class. They start out by reassessing the effect of modernization. They see the introduction of modernization as weakening the foundation of Chinese culture, since it brought about a rupture with the Chinese tradition. Here, the view of Zhang Dainian and He Xin reflects a love-hate attitude the Chinese leadership has toward modernization. On the one hand, the leadership sees an urgent need to advance the country's economic growth, and modernization will make that possible. On the other hand, it abhors the "ills" – the spiritual liberalization - modernization brings with it. To make sure modernization works to serve its needs, the Chinese leadership endeavors to separate the physical aspects of modernization from its spiritual aspects by implementing only economic reforms and promoting communist ideology. In other words, they do not see that modernization as an integration of the advancement of materialization and spiritualization. For the Chinese leadership, it is possible to carry out economic reforms, and yet forestall the modernization's potential spiritual liberalization by enforcing communist moral values. As Chen Aimei and Xu Xiaohui argue, "Modernization is a complex concept. It includes not only the development and transformation of science and technology, economic structure, political structure, social organization, but also [people's] way of life, value system and psychological aspects. It is a unity of

[173] Ibid., 89.

development of both material civilization and spiritual civilization, and a unity of transformation of society and humans."[174]

Zhang Dainian and He Xin echo the government's sentiment. As He Xin contends, "what was the situation of the ideological circle in 1988 [before the 1989 student protest]? All kinds of 'new concepts' and 'new methods' were emerging that worshipped anything foreign and insisted on wholesale westernization. The Chinese were self-degrading, self-despising, self-mistreating and self-vilifying."[175] Zhang Dainian is in agreement with He Xin. He proposes that the communist morality should be upheld to starve off spiritual liberalization. As he argues, "Humans should only pursue the upgrading of moral virtue, but not individual material enjoyment."[176] As they both see it, modernization is at best a tool, and it should not replace the essence of the Chinese culture. In other words, Chinese economic development needs to have a basis, or a pillar to guide it, and this guidance should come in the form of traditional Confucian moral values. As Zhang Dainian points out, in contemporary China, the Chinese need a "common culture" or a "common psychology." This "common culture" and "common psychology" can be found in Confucianism, which made the most significant contribution in forming the commonness of the Chinese nation.[177] Otherwise, in Zhang Dainian's words, the economic development will become "a river without its source, and a tree without its roots."[178]

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[174] Chen Aimei and Xu Xiaohui. "Zhongguo shehui zhuanxingqi xiandaihua fansi" [Reflection on the Modernization of Chinese Society in a Transitional Period] *Zhangchun shifan xueyuan xuebao*, no. 21 (2002): 8.

[175] He Xin, Zhongnaihia miza [Secret Letters to Zhongnanhai] (Hongkang: Mingjing chubanshe, 1997), 307.

[176] Zhang Dainian, "The Position of Confucius in Chinese Cultural History," *Complete Works,* 6:86.

[177] Ibid., 85.

[178] Zhang, "On How to Understand Traditional Culture Accurately," *Complete Works,* 6:158.

Zhang Dainian and He Xin see Confucianism as playing a critical role in the development of Chinese civilization. As Zhang Dainian holds, Confucianism is useful in stabilizing the social order.[179] He Xin explains why Confucianism is perceived as such. As he notes, the value of Confucianism can be summarized as promoting rationalism, calling for respect for emperors, and upholding nationalism.[180] Here, both Zhang Dainian and He Xin believe that the value of Confucianism lies in its efforts to pave the way for an effective governing by the ruling class. It is apparent here that Zhang Dainian and He Xin are vanguards of the ruling class. They respect Confucianism because its beliefs and practices were beneficial to the interests of ancient ruling class. By introducing Confucianism into contemporary Chinese society, they want to safeguard the interests of the modern-day ruling class – the communist leadership.

As the core of Confucianism is to attach importance to ethics, both Zhang Dainian and He Xin insist the ancient moral system be introduced into modern-day Chinese society to combat the "moral corruption" brought on by the introduction of westernization. As He Xin says emphatically: "When we uphold moral virtue, we will prosper. When we deny moral virtue, we will perish."181 He applauds the recent action by Jiang Zemin to "govern the country with virtue." Yet, for both of them, the reintroduction of Confucian morality should be instilled with contemporary content. In other words, the "virtue" should be an ideological concept filled with both historical and modern connotations. This is where He Xin attempts to combine conveniently

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[179] Zhang, "On Evaluation of Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasties," *Complete Works,* 6:328.
[180] He Xin, *On Chinese History,* 17.
[181] Ibid., 22.

communist ideology with Confucian moral values. As he argues, the "Three Representatives" proposed by Jiang Zemin are the quintessence of such virtue.[182]

Contrary to Li Hongzhi, who promotes individual morality for the his/her own spiritual well-being, the individual, as seen by Zhang Dainian and He Xin, is one who should succumb to the responsibility of the society. As Zhang Dainian notes: "One should overcome oneself to revive rites. That is to say, to restrain oneself with rites; when one listens, speaks and moves, one should follow rites."[183] Though Zhang Dainian does not explain what "rites" mean, any Chinese familiar with Confucianism will understand he refers to traditionally sanctioned norms. Here, the fundamental difference between the foci of Falungong and the communist theoreticians is made clear. For Falungong, an individual should follow morality to become a model society member. Chinese society could improve if everyone becomes moral. In contrast, the individual, in the view of Zhang Dainian and He Xin, should follow the morality prescribed by the central leadership. Or, to be moral is to conform. On the notion of conformity, Liu Sanfu makes an excellent comment on the harm of Confucianism to modern Chinese society. As he suggests,

> Any society possesses established ethical standards that regulate the behavior of social members. However, if such standard is built on the expense of smothering human creativity and self-consciousness, then it should not be held as real moral standard. Confucian ethics emphasize individuals should shoulder unlimited moral responsibility for the collectivity... At such, an individual loses his/her

[182] Ibid., 7.
[183] Zhang, "On Human Ideals," *Complete Works,* 2:285.

independence, and he/she becomes passive, without desire and without a sense of self. [184]

Yang Wei and Chen Hong talk about the link between Confucianism and authoritarianism. As they argue, "The goal of the so-called individual subjugating to the collectivity is to guide people to accept a feudal authoritarian system, and willingly become a brick or a slab at the foundation of feudal hierarchical pyramid."[185]

With the mission accomplished of establishing Confucianism as the official moral guidance, Zhang Dainian and He Xin begin to equate communist morality with traditional virtue. For them, the task to reintroduce tradition is never to revive ancient morality per se but to promote strains of communist ideology that share similarities with traditional moral values. They talk about communist morality as if it was a continuation of tradition, as when Zhang Dainian considers communist virtues. As he says, "Communist virtue mainly means collectivism and serving the people."[186] He is more specific in another instance. As he notes: "the most important moral virtue in our time is nationalism. In ancient China, there is the teaching 'to practice loyalty for one's country until one dies.' To be loyal to one's country, to the people and our ethnicity is the most moral virtue of our socialist time."[187] As for the role of private virtue, He Xin argues, "For the so-called virtue, 'the political virtue' is the primary virtue. It requires both politicians and citizens alike to shoulder responsibility to the country, ethnicity and

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[184] Liu Sanfiu, "Malposition," 58.
[185] Yang Wei and Chen Hong, "Luelun rujia lixiang renge de xue shi jiqi jingdai zhuanhuang" [On Defects of Confucian Personality and Their Role in Modern Times] *Journal of Haerbin Engineering University* (Social Science Section), no. 4 (2002): 32.
[186] Zhang, "Review and Look Ahead of Chinese History," *Complete Works,* 6:149.
[187] Ibid., 7:236.

society. The saying that 'everyone has a share of responsibility for the fate of his country' is an acknowledgement by the ancient people to such political virtue. Political virtue [promoted by the contemporary Chinese leadership] is 'big virtue,' whereas individual's private virtue is 'small' virtue.' The 'Three Representatives' proposed by Jiang Zemin is the political virtue that contemporary politicians must follow."[188] Zhang Dainian and He Xin here deliberately make indistinct the demarcation between tradition and communist ideology. Their action exposes their motives to use the guise of tradition to advocate communist ideology. Here is another popular rhetorical strategy that communist rhetoricians consistently use. They often talk about traditional and modern subjects together to blur what is ancient and what is modern.

As Zhang Dainian and He Xin successfully promote communist ideology in the name of tradition, they become unequivocal about what modern moral virtue they want to uphold. As they see it, the most important contemporary communist morality is the individual making sacrifice for the communist cause. On individual cultivation of moral virtue, Zhang Dainian says, "An individual life should be lived according to the following guidance: First, become oneness with the collectivity; one's words and action should always consider the interest of the majority. Second, one's primary life goal is to make contributions for the collectivity... Third, set up one's standard according to that of the majority. In sum, for one's words and deeds, keep those that are beneficial to the nation, and rid those that are harmful to the nation."[189] On making sacrifices to the collectivity, He Xin is even more radical. He proposes the term "foolishly royal" (*yuzhong*) to refer to an individual's attitude to the cause of the collectivity. As he

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[188] He Xin, *On Chinese History*, 7.
[189] Zhang, "Knowledge, Realization and Idealism," *Complete Works,* 1:474.

argues, "I think the interest of the country and the interest of the majority are the most important and most valuable. To be royal means to be foolish. To be royal means to be foolishly faithful to a belief… It means when necessary one dies for one's country."[190] These words by Zhang Dainian and He Xin are the key ideas of their writing, as they represent the central theme of communist ideology. Here, Zhang Dainian and He Xin reveal their role as the guards for the communist cause.

The motive to integrate tradition with communist ideals is ever made clearer in the following rhetoric. He Xin argues that remaining faithful to one's country is being true to the leadership. In his view, the entire China should be considered as a big family, where the leadership is the supreme father. As he notes, "Our entire political relationship is in essence the aggregation of familial relationship. The emperor is the pseudo father, and common father of the people, that he is the 'imperial father.'"[191] His view of the familial relationship between an emperor and his subjects extends to the contemporary society. As he says, "In fact, the traditional Chinese political structure is at the same time the political familial structure of the Chinese people. All officials are the respectable elders of the ruled… they should enjoy not only the right to rule, but also fatherly right (*fuquan*). The so-called fatherly right contains three points: one, the right to educate; two, the right to mete out orders and finally, the right to punish. This kind of right is natural, and cannot be challenged. Just as we cannot choose who our parents are, we do not have the right to choose who our leadership is."[192] The contemporary thinker Li Dazhao, on comparing the imperial system and familial relationships, wrote in his book,

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[190] He Xin, *Sikao: wode zhexue yu zongjiaoguan* [Reflection: My Philosophical and Religious Views] (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2001), 8.
[191] He Xin, *On Chinese History,* 151.
[192] Ibid.,220.

To Provide an Economic Explanation for Contemporary Chinese Ideological Transformation, that "the 'royalty' between an emperor and his subjects is actually the magnification of 'a familial relationship' between a father and a son. This is because the imperial authoritarian system is the macrocosm of a familial system that is based on fatherly right."[193] Li Dachao's words help us understand that the Chinese imperial authoritarian feudal system has been made possible by the traditional Chinese familial relationship in which the father is the supreme leader. Here, He Xin is using the parental metaphor to serve a modern purpose. He employs a rhetorical strategy to fuse two different concepts into one. By equating monarchical right with parental right, he substitutes a concept of natural right with a concept of political right. Since we cannot challenge parental rights, it follows we cannot challenge monarchical rights.

We conclude here that the efforts to revive Confucian tradition by communist theoreticians like Zhang Dainian and He Xin are politically motivated. Their revival of ancient ethical thoughts is meant to serve their contemporary expedient purpose to safeguard the legitimacy of an authoritarian leadership. In this aspect, their attempt to introduce tradition has a reactionary overtone. Tradition is used as a moral tool to resist the progress of the Chinese society.

Conclusion

In contemporary times, it has been a trend for Chinese theoreticians and academicians to debate what kind of national character of the Chinese people will facilitate the modernization of their society. Here, the moral teachings Li Hongzhi and

[193] Liu Sanfu, "Malposition," 59.

communist theoreticians advocate entail two distinct contrasts. The moral character Li Hongzhi promotes, under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, is individually focused. Within the moral confines, a person enjoys spiritual growth to the fullest extent. Such personalities tend to be self-autonomous, self-respectful, self confident, progressive, and strong. In contrast, the Confucian personality promoted by communist rhetoricians is obedient, subjugating, and submissive to the cause of the collectivity. Such characteristics will lead to the formation of an inferior national character of servility, dependence, timidity, selfishness, conservatism, and passivity, and will facilitate authoritarianism.

The above discussion suggests that in contemporary Chinese society, tradition has been an integral part of modernization. As discussed in chapter two, in the nation's urge to implement modernity, social actors discover they have to rely paradoxically on tradition or indigenous intellectual sources. In other words, homegrown modes of traditional practice have persisted. The cultural patterns, represented here by the three classical systems of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, have not been broken. Rather, they continue to shape and guide the behavior of contemporary social actors. As Yang Wei and Chen Hong aptly point out, "From the point of view of cultural anthropology, traditional Chinese culture has shaped tens and thousands of generations of Chinese… The reason that the Chinese become Chinese is because the peculiar Chinese culture has molded the Chinese who in turn crystallized the culture."[194] It follows then that it is true that tradition has shaped the ancient Chinese, and it will continue to influence contemporary Chinese culture.

[194] YangWei and Chen Hong, "On Defects of Confucian Personality" 31.

The use of tradition comes essentially in the form of reviving ancient traditional mores. As ancient Chinese morality has a binding character, stipulating how people should and should not behave, contemporary social actors see its usefulness in reforming and reshaping the ethical behavior of the Chinese in the present day. Morality is thus seen as a force to reverse the moral degradation of contemporary China. Social actors continue what their ancestors have been plugging on for centuries: to use morality to keep their country safe. Tradition also becomes their political tool. It lends them moral appeal in their advancement of their respective ideologies. Their adherence to different strains of tradition helps them to try to gain an upper hand in the contemporary ideological contestation with each other.

Chapter Four

Falungong's Contemporary Sociological, Moral and Cultural Appeals

The Chinese religious movement Falungong has gained worldwide attention since 1999. The attention is focused on the popularity and the momentum of the movement. Falungong once claimed to have a membership of 100 million practitioners.[195] The members of Falungong are from all walks of life: they are college students, scholars, workers, merchants and peasants. It is worthy to note that among the members of Falungong, there are 200,000 Chinese Communist Party members; these Communist Party members range from senior party officials to rank and filers: they are party secretaries at the grass root level, model workers, war heroes, and eminent party leaders who once joined the Long March.

The fact that Falungong has been successful in attracting such a huge number of Chinese still intrigues both Chinese Studies scholars and China watchers. I argue the popularity of Falungong lies in its sociological, moral, and cultural appeals to Chinese masses. Falungong reflects the hope and yearnings of many common Chinese for relief from harsh social conditions, and for a vision of alternative social reality. It holds sociological interest because it is taking up a role the government has failed to provide – to offer therapy and healing to the vast number of Chinese who are marginalized in the nation's drastic social transformation. It is morally appealing because in the face of corruption, cynicism, and moral decline in the contemporary Chinese society, it upholds

[195] The statistic comes from Danny Schechter's *Falungong's Challenge to China* (New York: Akashic Books, 2000). According to the same book, the membership of the Chinese Communist Party is only fifty-six million. Hence, the membership of Falungong practitioners is twice as much as that of the Chinese Communist Party members.

moral rectitude by inheriting Taoism and Buddhism. It has a cultural appeal because it develops in Falungong members a sense of self-awareness that both ancient and contemporary Chinese cultural and political traditions have suppressed. The moral and cultural elements are especially important as they are the deciding factors for the long-lasting appeal of the dissident spiritual movement to its members.

In this chapter, I will carry out an in-depth discussion of the moral, sociological and cultural appeals of Falungong. Through a textual analysis of Li Hongzhi's writings, most notably his spiritual guidebook, *Zhuna Fa Lun,* and the testimonies of Falungong members, I argue the rise of Falungong is a complex social phenomenon in contemporary China; it is a response to the peculiar socio-political condition in a so-called "post-socialism" period in China, a consequence of uneven results of the economic reform and the introduction of modernity.

Background

Present-day China has been identified as an era of "post-socialism." In such an era, socialist legitimacy and credibility have been disintegrated; there exists the massive disillusion of the common people with their actual life condition, the popular perception of the Party's moral authority, and profound public awareness of the failure of the socialist system and alienation from its alleged moral justification. Moreover, the post-socialist condition, which features a lack of citizen participation in political affairs and a general apathy toward democratic reform, forms a vicious cycle. This creates a vacuum

at the center of political discourse and renders people incapable of envisioning any positive alternative to dysfunctional socialism.[196]

The present circumstances find Chinese trying to balance between the desire for a better standard of living, ruthless economic competition, the accelerated pace of life, the pressure of commercialization, and conflicts between the old and new, between Chinese and non-Chinese cultures, and between new economic reality and old political reflexes. "The being after" embedded in this still emerging new era contains a note of anxiety and unpreparedness, sometimes tinged with regret for the relative simplicity of the old ways or a deep sense of uncertainty.[197]

Chinese artists and authors were among the first to depict the response of the ordinary Chinese people to modernization. The deepest dilemmas of the human condition, as manifested in images of the "confused self," "hostile others," "endless waiting," "absurd reality," and "a meaningless existence associated with the routine of everyday life," have been vividly captured and conveyed in the fictional characters of Bai Dao and Xu Xing, in the poetic metaphors of Yang Lian and Gu Cheng, and in the paintings of "New Art Wave" artists of the mid and late 1980s.[198]

The testimonies of the Falungong members reflect, from the perspective of ordinary Chinese, the mood and the psychology of despair and frustration when dealing with the sudden changes effected by economic reforms. Take an example, we examine the testimony of Li Yixiang, a Falungong member and a graduate student from one of the top Chinese Universities:

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[196] Ben Xu, *The Disenchanted Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 10.
[197] Ibid., 5.
[198] Min Lin and Maria Galikowski, *The Search for Modernity: Chinese Intellectuals and Cultural Discourse in the Post Mao Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 23.

> After I became a graduate student of Qinghua University (the Chinese equivalency of MIT – author), I was surrounded by brilliant fellow graduate students. I experienced difficulties in scientific research and felt overwhelmed by responsibilities. I felt acutely a great loss of self-assurance and self-esteem. I felt profound psychological pressure, and my health started to deteriorate.[199]

Li Yixiang's words represent the general response of many Chinese to the introduction of modernity. Their first reaction to the impact of modernization is their loss of the sense of self. They seem to have been thrown into a foreign and hostile environment where they have lost their bearings. They experience confusion, anxiety and despair. The psychological feeling leads to what they perceive as the deterioration of their physical health, though the weakening of their health often lacks pathological causes. Indeed, most of the Falungong members cite "health reasons" as the primary factor to join the group. Quantitative surveys also confirm their claims. According to a five-city wide survey conducted by eleven medical specialists from Beijing Union Hospital and ten other Chinese hospitals in October 1998, of the 12,371 Falungong members they interviewed, 58.5% said they became healthy after practicing Falungong; 24.9% said they felt strong improvement.[200] The testimony and empirical data cited here, in a qualitative way, provide evidence of the personal displacement ordinary Chinese feel about modernity, and most importantly, the need to find healing somewhere.

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[199] Li Yixiang, "Yige boshisheng yu falungong de juelie" [How a Ph.D Student Broke Away from FLG] *People's Daily*, Jan. 5, 2000.

[200] Zhao Yangong, "Hepin jiejue Falungong wengti" [Solve the Issue of Falungong Peacefully] *Beijing Spring* 83 (2000): 37-39.

Studies on the negative impact of modernity done by western scholars can help shed light on our understanding of the Chinese situation. Both Anthony Giddens and Wade Roof argue that the impact of modernity becomes a matter of existential questions; it makes people feel "ontologically insecure," according to Roof, or "ontologically uncertain." A person feels a lack of consistent feeling of biographical continuity, is preoccupied with apprehension of possible risks to his or her existence, and finally, feels morally "empty" because he lacks the warmth of a loving "self-regard."[201] Giddens and Roof believe that this can produce negative physiological reactions. In a similar light, in his book, *Work on Myth*, Hans Blumenberg uses the term "angst" to describe the forceful personal impact of modernity. He argues that each time so-called modernity has moved further into secular history, triumphantly leaving mythology behind, it has mythologized its triumphs. Thus it has inherited, and now occupies, a vast domain of enigmatic questions for which it has no answer.[202] He explains, "We must allow for the fact that any epoch may inherit questions which the culture cannot answer within the presuppositions."[203] Blumenberg's remarks are particularly relevant in the case study of China. China has moved abruptly from a revolutionary era, where class struggles and political campaigns were once the major goals of social activities, to an era of modernity, where economic activities prevail. In the new reform era, the old cultural presuppositions from the revolutionary era did not apply, but there have not evolved new cultural presuppositions that guide the new society. It is understandable that Falungong, as a spiritual movement, has appeared to fill that void.

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[201] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 53.
[202] Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth,* trans. R. M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 7.
[203] Ibid., 351.

Therapeutic Functions of Falungong

It is against such a backdrop that Falungong rose to immense popularity. A great number of Falungong members claim that what attracts them initially is the therapeutic function of the religious group. Yet, Li Hongzhi, the spiritual leader of Falungong, does not provide cure for a "sick" body in the conventional biomedical sense, but, rather, professes to get rid of what he sees as the root cause of the "illness" – spiritual degradation. What he accomplishes is to purify the human body of sinful karma. As he argues, "Some people think that treating patients, curing their illnesses, and improving their health are good deeds. In my view, they have not really cured the illness. Instead of removing them, these people have either prolonged or spread the illness to another part of the body, but not eliminated it. To solve this problem, to really get rid of the illness, [we] must remove the karma."[204]

"Karma" is one of the key terms in Li Hongzhi's writings. Karma, which he alternately terms *yie li* or "black substance," accumulates when an individual performs bad deeds. His conception of the etiology of disease mainly comes from the karma in the human body. "When this black substance is accumulated to a great amount, it will form a field surrounding one's body, which will wrap him inside," resulting in sickness.[205] He equates karma with "disease poison" (*bingdu*), and "germs or bacteria" (*xijun*).[206] Even worse, karma prevents one from believing in moral laws. "With a lot of black substance, one's enlightenment quality will be affected. Because it forms a field around one's body and wraps a person up right in the middle, one is cut off from Zhen-Shan-Ren, the characteristics of the universe. Thus, this person's enlightenment quality will be

[204] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuang fa lun,* 3.
[205] Ibid., 128.
[206] Chang, *Falun Gong: The End of Days*, 76.

poor."[207] To remove karma, Li Hongzhi administers the purification of the body of his believers. "All the bad things on your mind, the karmic field surrounding your body, and the elements that make your body unhealthy will be cleaned out. If they are not cleaned out, how can you, with such an impure, dark body and a filthy mind, practice cultivation toward a higher level?"[208]

For Li Hongzhi, purification of a human body involves the accumulation of *de* (virtue, white substance). Li Hongzhi argues that the acquirement of *de* is the ultimate goal of cultivation. To acquire *de* is to practice good deeds, to endure suffering and above all, to relinquish human desire.

> Cultivation must take place through suffering so as to test whether you can part with or care less about different sentimentality and desire. If you are attached to these things, you will not succeed in cultivation. [Human beings] live just for this sentimentality. Affection among family members, love between a man and a woman, love for parents, feelings, friendship, doing things for friendship, and everything else all relate to this sentimentality... If you are free from this sentimentality, nobody can affect you. An everyday person's mind will be unable to sway you. What takes over in its place is benevolence, which is something more noble.[209]

This passage demonstrates a central value Li Hongzhi attempts to instill in his believers, namely, the detachment of human sentimentality and desire. Only when one is rid of

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[207] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan fa lun,* 148-149.
[208] Ibid., 5.
[209] Ibid., 140.

these mundane sentiments and feelings is he/she capable of engaging in spiritual cultivation. In other words, only a person with a "pure" mind can participate in spiritual practice. Li Hongzhi's belief in the elimination of human sentiment and carnal desire appears to be influenced by Taoism. For the ancient religious thought recommends the detachment of the self, emotionality from human interaction and society. A Taoist should avoid all human attachment – those of love, lust, fame, fortune, popularity, and success.[210] However, Li Hongzhi "borrows" from the traditional teachings to deal with the morality of contemporary Chinese society. When a believer is cultivated, he/she does not become separated from the society to seek seclusion, as a traditional Taoist would do. Rather, he/she becomes a role model for others to emulate. Li Hongzhi gives an example,

> One director at a city's Falungong instruction center went to a factory to see how Falungong practitioners were doing. The factory manager came out to meet him in person: 'Since studying Falun Dafa, these workers having been coming to work early and going home late. They work very hard and do any assignment the boss gives them. They no long compete for personal gain. By doing so, they have made the whole factory take on a new look, and the factory's economic returns have improved.[211]

The factory manager's comments about the good deeds of Falungong practitioners reflect, in small measure, how morally inspired people become once they started to

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[210] Chang, *Falun Gong: The End of Days,* 40.
[211] Li Hongzhi, *Zhung fa lun,* 142.

believe in Falungong. Stories like this one are frequent and common during the peak period of Falungong practice. It is both heartening and ironic: it is heartening because it shows that many Chinese want to be moral in the face of general spiritual decline of the contemporary Chinese society; once there is a forceful call from a charismatic spiritual leader to raise the moral level, they listen and take actions. It is ironic because it shows that a folk religious leader, rather than the communist leadership, is more compelling in its power.

Ultimately, Li Hongzhi's vision of a "cultivated" practitioner follows Zhen-Shan-Ren, the law of the universe. As he observes, the universe "does not only have its material existence," it is fundamentally moral in character. Simply put, there is "*Fa* (law) in this universe."[212] That law is comprised of *zhen, shan,* and *ren* (truth, benevolence and forbearance), which are at once the nature, composition and characteristic of the universe, as well as the source of all other moral virtues. All matter in the universe assumes forms of this law at different levels. As Li puts it, "Life is benevolent.... There is the characteristic of Zhen (truth, truthfulness) –Shan (benevolence, kindness, compassion) – Ren (endurance, forbearance, tolerance) in the tiny particles of air, rock, wood, soil, iron and steel, the human body, as well as in all matter.... This characteristic of Zhen-Shan-Ren is the sole criterion for determining what is good or bad.... As a human being, if you follow... Zhen-Shan-Ren, you are a good person. One who goes against this characteristic is genuinely a bad person."[213]

Falungong believers' response to Li Hongzhi's teachings is varied. According to a research report conducted by Sichuan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, for

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[212] Ibid., 27.
[213] Ibid., 14-15.

those Falungong members who are well educated - the intellectuals and the retired government officials, Li Hongzhi's moral admonition strikes a cord in their heart. They believe Li Hongzhi's teachings provide a rational explanation to issues in society and human life.[214] "By reading *Zhuan Fa Lun* many times, many practitioners came to understand issues that have perplexed them in the past," as one Falungong believer notes.[215] However, for the majority of Falungong members, they are not well educated enough to link the relationship between body and mind. They simple feel the tangible results of the restoration of good health. The following is one member's testimony:

> Before I practiced Falungong, I had hepatitis B. Within six months, the illness changed from acute to chronic. I took the best western medicine, but did not feel better. I had to leave my job. My daily life had to be cared for by my wife... Then I came into contact with Falungong. The day when I heard Master Li's lecture, my appetite improved. After I started to practice Falungong, I stopped using medicine... It has been three years. I am full of energy. People say to me, 'I have good color, and my face looks ruddy".[216]

Wang Youqun, in his letter to Jiang Zemin, uses the term "cast off one's old self and being reborn" (*tuotai huangu*) to refer to the thorough change Li Hongzhi's teachings are able to bring about.[217] Apparently, Li's "magic" cannot be explained in conventional

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[214] "Toushi yu shengjiu: dui Falungong chimizhe xianxiang de diaocha yu fengxi" [An investigation and analysis of Falungong Believers] *Social Science Research,* no. 5 (2001): 105.

[215] Wang Youqun, "A Letter on Falungong," *Beijing Spring*, no. 10 (1999): 26.

[216] Chen Jiqun, "Falundafa jianghuale wode shengti, chunjiele wode xinling" [Falungong has Purified My Body and Cleansed My Soul], *Falungong Publication, no.* 7 (2000):3.

[217] Wang Youqun, "A Letter on Falungong," 26.

biomedical terms. But if we remind ourselves about the "angst," or the threat to one's existence one experiences in the face of massive social transformation, we can conclude that physiologically, by practicing the religious teachings, Falungong members develop "a sense of control" to cope with an overwhelming reality.

What accounts for this sense of control? Scholars have attempted to answer this question from various angles. As Susanne Rudolph sees it, "religious teachings [give members] new orientations, social skills and collective self-confidence. The ritual and belief system of religious communities have a 'security' component that makes possible both physical and cultural survival."[218] Rudolph's comments once again link the efficacy of Li Hongzhi's teachings to the orientation of "self". Through cultivation, Falungong members are able to develop self-renewal. They acquire confidence and strength in their sense of self. While what Rudolph says may have a general application to all religious groups, other scholars provide thoughts that are relevant to the particular Chinese situation. According to Lucian Pye, a taboo within Chinese culture about admitting to having private interests has created an irresolvable problem of craving for intimacy and of idealizing warm relationships.[219] As Shang Jiuyu, a Chinese scholar from Beijing Normal University, argues, Chinese religions such as Buddhism and Taoism are particularly therapeutic. They offer justifiable explanations about the decline of the society, especially about existence of suffering and evil. In addition, Chinese religions exhort their believers to practice kindness; it links human suffering with the consequence of personal actions. It also tells members to find the cause of suffering within. As a

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[218] Susanne H. Rudolph, *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 2.
[219] Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 23.

result, members' mental endurance is solidified.[220] Chinese author Wu Fan pinpoints the source of strength of Falungong. As he notes, "The 'Truthfulness, Benevolence, and Forbearance' proposed by Li Hongzhi in his lucid teachings, fill up the spiritual void common Chinese people experience. Through practicing the [Falungong] meditation exercise together, Falungong practitioners reestablish the kind of human relationship they seem to lack. "[221]

The Moral Appeal of Falungong

As seen in the previous chapter, Falungong draws heavily from the ethical thoughts of Taoism and Buddhism. Its core moral-religious teachings on human transcendence to higher spiritual plane, self-cultivation and discarding worldly desires come directly from Taoist and Buddhist influence. Indeed, Falungong aims to renovate, revitalize and reframe the Taoist and Buddhist notions of human transcendence, self-cultivation, and discarding worldly desires, and reemploy them so that they suit the needs of the modern world.

While using Taoist and Buddhist ethical thinking as its moral touchstones, Falungong breaks into new ground to tailor the concepts of classical traditions for the need of a modern religion. For example, it eliminates the mystical value of Taoism and transmigratory nature of Buddhism- the reincarnation of life, and emphasizes their this-worldly dimension. Charles B. Jones points out an essential characteristic of modern religion, which illuminates the contemporary relevance of Falungong. As he contends, "modern religion tends to emphasize a this-worldly soteriology, affirming that salvation

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[220] Shang Jiuyun, "Shilun Zhonjiao zhi gongneng" [On the Functions of Chinese Religions] *Journal of Zhengzhou University* 4 (1997):53-57.

[221] Wu Fan, "Falungong yu zhonggong douzheng de youlai jiqi fazhan" [The Origin and Development of the Struggle between Falungong and Chinese Communist Party] *Beijing Spring*, no. 6 (2001): 14.

(however conceived) is to be sought and found in this world, and not in an escape from it to a better realm."[222] If we refresh our memory, we remember that the ultimate concern of both traditional Taoism and Buddhism is the deliverance of an individual from worldly confinement to reach a blissful state of other world. Though Falungong also puts an emphasis on human transcendence to a higher moral plane, unlike Taoism and Buddhism, the "salvation" of an individual for Falungong focuses in this-world, and is based in social reality. For example, as Li Hongzhi points out, the so called "salvation" of an individual occurs when he/she has acquired *de* (virtue), been rid of *yeli* (bad karmic force), and developed *shan* (Buddha nature) and *ren* (the ability to endure suffering). In view of the drastic moral decline of the current Chinese society, Li's call for human moral transcendence has no doubt a strong contemporary focus.

The following is an example of an ideal personality Li Hongzhi envisions. He appropriately terms such a person as one with "great inborn quality" (*da gen qi zhi ren*). He says, "[He] must first have a great amount of *de* (virtue) and a very large field of this white substance – this is certain.[223] Meanwhile, this person should also be able to endure the toughest hardships of all. He must have a mind of great forbearance, too, and be able to sacrifice. He must be able to preserve *de* as well, have good enlightenment quality."[224] Here, Li Hongzhi's description of personhood illustrates his inheritance of the Buddhist tradition, as his hero seems to have stepped out of the page of an ancient Buddhist religious scripture, demonstrating the qualities of a "good" Buddhist. Yet, we note this

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[222]Charles Jones, "Transitions in the Practice and Defense of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradtions,* ed. Steven Heine et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127.

[223] Li Hongzhi tends to equate virtue with white substance, as opposed to sinful karma, which he refers to as black substance. For detailed discussion on these concepts, see Li, *Zhuan Fa Lun,* chap.4, 127-139.

[224] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Fa Lun,* 232.

personhood exhibits the central sprit of Falungong – a display of *shan* (benevolence) and *ren* (forbearance) and the acquirement of *de* (virtue). Even though the role model Li Hongzhi wants his believers to emulate is heavily influenced by tradition, the model acquires his virtue through modern means. Let us consider an example he gives: "One practitioner works in a textile factory in a city in Shandong Province. After studying Falun Dafa, he taught other co-workers to practice. As a result, the factory has taken on a new look. He used to take home pieces of towels from the textile factory, and so did the rest of the employees. After practicing Dafa, instead of taking things home, he brought back to the factory what he took home before. When others saw his actions, nobody would take things home anymore."[225] Another strategy Li Hongzhi uses to retain the contemporary relevance of his teaching is to use popular official political concepts of the government to illustrate his point. For example, he says, "[If] every one of us cultivates his inner self, examines his own *xinxing* (mind-nature) to look for the causes of wrongdoing so as to do better next time, and considers others first when taking any action, human society would become better and ethical standards would rise again. The *spiritual civilization* would also become better and so would public security." "Spiritual Civilization" is a popular communist terminology in its political communication in contemporary China. It refers to reforming people's minds and morality, and this term is often used in contrast with the term "material civilization." Li Hongzhi's use of such popular communist terminology shows his concern to make his teachings as current as possible.

[225] Ibid.,142.

For Falungong, the realization of individual transcendence and spiritual attainment has to come with the accompaniment of helping others. This is where Falungong appears to be influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, the branch of Buddhism that calls on sympathy for all creatures and the hope of salvation for all humanity. Throughout *Zhuan Fa Lun,* Li Hongzhi commends those Falungong believers who help others to cultivate spirituality. Li gives an example, "The main purpose of our cultivating Falun Dafa is to help brings others to high levels. It can assume a great constructive role by promoting spiritual civilization in society. If everyone examines his/her inner self and considers how to conduct himself or herself well, I would say that society will stabilize and the human moral standard will improve again."[226] This passage reflects a high concern of Li Hongzhi. He makes sure that an individual moral action has positive ripple effects on others and on society in general. For Falungong, one of the reasons for its long-lasting popularity with believers is the insistence on connecting the spiritual attainment of an individual with that of others; a true Falungong believer should be someone who incessantly performs good deeds to raise morality and improve Chinese society.

Li Hongzhi's final concern is to build an ideal society. He aims for the general improvement of modern Chinese society. His vision of "a good society" is specific and clear:

> When people do not pay attention to virtue, the world will be chaotic and unable to rule. Everyone lives unhappily because he is hostile to those around him. When people live a miserable existence, they are not afraid to die. At such, if

[226] Ibid.,142.

> laws and regulations are issued to keep order, it will achieve the opposite effect. To alleviate such a state of affairs, [the leader] must cultivate virtue in common people. When court officials are not selfish, the nation is not corrupt; when common people cultivate their moral character and attach importance to virtue, when both the leader and the people restrain their heart, the country will be stable, popular wish will be on the side of the leader, the nation will be strengthened, the enemy will be fearful and the society will be peaceful.[227]

The central thesis of the passage is that when both leader and the people cultivate virtue, the society will become orderly of its own accord. The assumption is that the leaders will have to be moral themselves first. Only then should they rule the society with gentle guidance. These Falungong beliefs are compatible with Taoist theory of non-action regarding the role of government. The following passage, from *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy,* illustrates a typical attitude of Taoism on how a government should be run:

> Govern the state with correctness.
> Operate the army with surprise tactics.
> Administer the empire by engaging in no activity.
> How do I know that this should be so?
> Through this:
> The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world,

[227] Li Hongzhi, *Falun fofa,* 125.

The poorer the people will be.

The more sharp weapons the people have,

The more troubled the state will be.

The more cunning and skill man possesses,

The more vicious things will appear.

The more laws and order are made prominent,

The more thieves and robbers there will be.

Therefore the sage says:

I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed.

I love tranquility and the people of themselves become correct.

I engage in no activity and the people of themselves become prosperous.

I have no desires and the people of themselves become simple.[228]

This passage reveals the Taoist attitude on the relationship between a government and its people. A Taoist believes that the common people are inherently moral and can transform themselves. To compare this passage with that of Falungong, we can say they talk about the same matter – the governing of a nation – from different sides of a coin. Like Taoism, Li Hongzhi upholds the vital role of morality in the administration of a society, and is critical of the heavy use of state machinery. Similar to Taoism, Li is optimistic about the ethical attitude of the common people. When they all engage in cultivation of individual virtue, society will be prosperous.

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[228] Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 166.

Perhaps, the most lasting moral appeal to Falungong members comes from Li Hongzhi's emphasis on the power of self-effort of an individual. This is where he appears to have been made a distinct departure from Taoism and Buddhism. Unlike Buddhism and Taoism, which place heavy emphasis on the role of fate and super natural force, Falungong stresses human self-effort. To reach spiritual attainment, one does not rely on supernatural power; rather, one has to have a strong self-conscience and one's heart has to be in the right place. To realize a perfect world is through collective human effort.

With these goals in mind, Li accentuates the notion of the efficacy of human agency. The most famous example is Li's discussion of developing a "Heavenly Eye" (*tien mu)* in *Zhuan Fa Lun.*[229] The "Heavenly Eye" enables one to see into a variety of levels: the powers of distant vision, clairvoyance, and a whole variety of things.[230] (Ownby 2000, 11). As being consistent with his overall theme, Li connects the development of "Heavenly Eye" with the cultivation of one's heart.[231] Another example is the importance of "Fa Lun" in a human body. "Fa Lun," alternately named the wheel of *dharma,* refers to a pressure point in the lower abdomen of a human body where positive energy from the universe is absorbed and negative energy is released. By following Li Hongzhi's teachings, Falungong believers can metaphysically transplant "Fa Lun" in their bodies. Li's discourse of limitless human potential lends profound moral power to his followers. To a disheartened people who feel powerless in the face of an

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[229] For a detailed discussion on "Heavenly Eye," see Li Hongzhi, chap 2, in *Zhuan Fa Lun* , 41-56.

[230] David Ownby, "Transnational China Project Commentary: Falungong as a Cultural Revitalization Movement: A Historian Looks at Contemporary China," (Talk Given at Rich University), October 20, 2000, http://www.ruf.rice.edu (accessed May 12, 2003).

[231] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Fa Lun,*, 46-47.

adverse reality, Li's positive assertion of the strength of human body holds, no doubt, an immense appeal.

Falungong's Cultural Appeal

Falungong is able to exert long-lasting influence because it holds strong cultural appeal to its believers, and inspires in them a sense of idealism for a just and free reality in which they could not find in present China. Instead of stalking in the past, they focus their vision upon the future. To strive for an idealistic goal instills in members a positive energy to effect changes in the Chinese society. From a passive and victimized role, Falungong members become active agents of change.

Many Chinese see Falungong as a viable alternative for a people earnestly in search of a belief to rest their hopes upon. The following statement by a Falungong sympathizer bears testimony to how some of the Chinese perceive Falungong,[232]

> A society without a common belief is a society to be feared. If my child lived in such a society, I would be very worried. You may have seen or may not, a true believer of Falungong places demands on him/herself sincerely according to 'truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance,' and tries to be a kind person every moment of the day. Only when there are more such good people, can the society become better. If my child lived in such a society, I, as a mother, would feel reassured. Through my experiences and observation of the Chinese society, I

[232] "www. Faludafa.org" and "www. Faluninfo.net" are two official web sites of Falungong. Yet, different unofficial Falungong groups regularly publish all kinds of printed materials. These materials usually do not list any information of the publisher, and they are distributed for free.

> realized: the indoctrination of the government, the punishment of the law and inculcation of knowledge cannot change a person's heart, but a belief can.[233]

Indeed, it is the idealism that has been incorporated into the slogans of Falungong of "truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance" that attracted many common Chinese people to join the religious group. Xu Xiaohua, the deputy director of the general office of Falungong in Yunan province, says it is the idealism, especially the spirit of "giving benefits and opportunities to others and save difficulties for oneself" that greatly touched her, and helped her decide to join the group.[234]

Li's teachings have inspired many common Chinese people, who, theretofore, are frustrated with reality but have not been able to come up with their own answers to change the reality. Li's call to become a moral person is accepted by many of his followers. In the testimonies of numerous Falungong members, one common theme is how they have become model citizens after believing in Falungong. The following testimony by a Falungong member, in his open letter to the representatives of the National People's Congress, is typical of the sentiment of Falungong members:

> Are we members of a cult? There is only one answer: No. We are kind people whose actions follow the standard of 'truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance,' who are considerate of others and find fault with ourselves. [Take myself as an example], I have cleaned garbage dropped by others in public places, I have tried to find help to repair a faulty public water faucet, I have cleaned public toilets, I

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233 "A Letter Home," *Falungong Publication,* July 2000.
234 "Mitu zhifan"[Coming back from an Astrayed Road], *People's Daily,* July 31, 1999, overseas edition.

> have brought water for my office mates and I have tried to arouse the attention of others in my company to save xerox paper... I did all this after I began practicing Falungong.[235]

This passage is typical of the sentiment of a great number of Falungong members. For them, to reach the so-called "spiritual attainment" contains a strong contemporary flavor: they are unlike the traditionally "devout" members of the religious practice whose single focus is on deity and individual experience of salvation. Rather, they achieve the modern moral standard of being unselfish, considerate of others' interests and active in making the world a better place. Furthermore, spiritual transcendence means to go beyond the realm of personal concern to reflect on the larger world. The experience of Falungong enables them to be reflective on their own world outlook, previous political beliefs, the future of the country and political rights. The testimony of many Falungong members reveals that they look beyond the pure religious practices to reflect upon the moral standard of the country, crisis of faith, political practices and even human rights. In other words, they become questioners of the existing reality.

The following passage illustrates the mental exercise a Falungong member goes through when confronted with a serious political issue. He is ready to step out of the role of a religious believer, and becomes a citizen with a critical mind. For him, to reach the spiritual elevation is never an end in itself; rather, he links his personal fate with that of society. He is conscious of the role he plays.

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[235] "An Open Letter to the Delegates of the Chinese National People's Congress," *China Spring* 194 (1999): 64-65.

> I had a conversation with a senior official from the Public Security Bureau. I asked him: 'Which do you adhere to: the constitution or the decisions of the central leadership?' He answered: '[We] adhere to the decision of the central leadership.' I asked him again: 'Do we have rights to make recommendations to the decision of the central leadership on the handling of Falungong?' He answered firmly, 'No. On other matters you can. [But on the matter of Falungong], you cannot.' Up hearing this, I am perplexed. It has been clearly stipulated in the constitution that 'all laws, administrative regulations and regional regulations cannot contradict the constitution.' If the statement 'The central leadership has made a decision' is used to stall us, why does one need the constitution to constrain one's action? Isn't it true that it is possible for the central government to make mistakes, and hence our country needs a fundamental law?[236]

All the previous examples indicate there is a mental transition Falungong members go through. They start with a preoccupation to improve their personal lot but end with an overriding concern for the betterment of the society. These examples of mental transcendence fit into what Roof calls "reframing" of religious experiences. For Roof, Reframing occurs when religious speech or symbols are used not to convey some transcendent truth or reality as traditionally understood, but as a means of *creating* truth or *provoking* confrontation with it. Rather than looking upon symbols as fixed realities in some objective manner, they become negotiated and situational, used to construct a set of meanings in the face of serious human dilemmas and existential concerns. This amounts to a highly reflective act, an undertaking designed to force interpretation either by

[236] Ibid., 64.

dislodging old meanings and/or provoking new ones. Implicit is the assumption that it falls on the individual, or small groups of individual to weave a coherent narrative of meaning and life, and that religious symbols and practices are at their perusal and disposal.[237] Roof's discussion of "reframing" sheds light on the powerful force of the Falungong movement. Unlike traditional Taoist or Buhhdist believers, whose interpretations of the religious texts are literal, and whose actions are isolated and individualistic in nature, Falungong members reflect upon the religious texts and their religious experiences, and draw out implications relating to larger political and social issues, using culture as the common frame of reference. Their reflection is significant because they confront what are previously considered to be overriding truths. From the passive and oppressed, Falungong members, in collective action, become questioners and actors in their capacity to contest the political state of affairs of Chinese society.

Self-Discovery

Perhaps the most far-reaching influence of the Falungong movement is that Falungong members begin to develop a strong sense of self-awareness, which is a new development in the Chinese social and political history. From ancient China, when Confucianism promotes social hierarchy, self is sacrificed to succumb to the interest of family and state. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, self is suppressed for total loyalty to the interest of central government. In contrast, the Falungong movement facilitates the growth of self-awareness. The self-awareness is initially purely psychological: members regain their sense of self to cope with an adverse

[237] Wade Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 169.

reality. However, the self gradually becomes social: members begin to develop a critical mind.

The nascent sign of such a development begins with a protest by Falungong members to the government for the violation of citizens' rights – rights to practice Falungong, as seen in the following except from the open letter Falungong members wrote to UN Secretary General Koffi Annan: Can one see any reflection of a lawful nation from the various heinous deeds of the official suppression? Are they not tramping of law from the law enforcers – a clear case of power superceding the law? Isn't this a serious violation of human dignity – the most basic right of a human being? People should have freedom of belief, and the freedom to express one's opinion, but we cannot have them.[238] This passage strikes us as the expression of a political voice of a citizen who has formed a clear sense of critical consciousness. It is a far cry from a former Chinese who is acquiescent to the politics of the Chinese leadership and who makes no demands on the system. The new development is the political art of recognition of violation and oppression. It signals the formation of a critical step for a citizen to change from a political accomplice to a contender of the status quo.

This new development is significant in terms of the larger picture of China's progress to democracy. Scholars have conjured up different scenarios of how China will do this. Although their arguments vary, many scholars agree that China will ultimately become a democratic country following its own peculiar path. In this regard, the recent development seems to indicate that, for the Chinese, the road to democracy is not going to be on a "grand" scale, (i.e., overnight coming into existence of some anti-governmental forces), or in a "dramatic" scheme, (i.e., the occurrence of a revolution);

[238] "An Open Letter to UN Secretary General Annan," *China Spring* 194 (1999): 63-64.

rather, it will happen in a most rudimentary and ordinary sense, that is, in an incremental and quotidian way in the everyday forms of resistance.[239] A modest starting point is the fact that Chinese people have first begun to fight for freedom of conscience.

Falungong members' struggle for freedom of conscience is going through several stages. A Falungong member uses the term "conscience" to illustrate the metamorphosis of a Chinese citizen goes through from a political compliance to criticize. As he argues:

> After the rule of high-pressure for the past fifty years, to speak 'against one's conscience,' and perform deeds 'against one's conscience,' have become a normal part of the lives of the Chinese... We denounce the so called 'bourgeoisie libelization' against our conscience; we support the slaughter at Tiananmen [in 1989] against our conscience... Consequently, our China has become a world filled with lies, absurdities and false appearances. Amidst this, we see Falungong members stand up bravely and proudly say to the Chinese authorities: I will speak truthfully; I do not want to lie any more."[240]

Clearly indicated in this passage is the formation of self-awareness. Before the occurrence of Falungong Movement, the common Chinese people have committed many political deeds against their conscience. Now, a breaking point has reached when the

[239] The best scholarly work to support this line of argument is *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance,* ed. Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[240] Xiao Xiaojun, "Buzai weixin" [No Longer against One's Conscience] *Falungong Publication,* July 2000.

Chinese want to be defiant, stand up to the government and say with a finality, "No more lies from us."

In his prominent work on "Weapons of the Weak," political scientist James C. Scott uses the Marxist term "false consciousness," in an ironic way, to indicate acquiescence of the exploited group to the rule of the elites or the state. This is made possible by the ruling class in "creating and disseminating a universe of discourse and the concepts to go with it, by defining the standards of what is true, beautiful, moral, fair, and legitimate, they build a symbolic climate that prevents subordinate classes from thinking their way free. False consciousness is thus the 'symbolic alignment' of elite and subordinate class values."[241] What we see in China today, in the case of Falungong, is the shedding of this false consciousness and an attempt by the Falungong members to develop independent consciousness. Or to use Scott's words, the Chinese are "thinking their way free."[242] Scott's quote could have come from any political speeches of a communist government. But here we are turning the government's own rhetoric back on it.

The development of independent consciousness necessarily connotates an exercise of independent judgment. Min Lin and Maria Galikowski, authors of *Search of Modernity*, see this as the starting point of a new epistemology. As they point out, any universal or transcendent principles or truth should not be taken for granted and imposed on the collective in an arbitrary fashion. On the contrary, these truths or principles,

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[241] James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 39-40.
[242] Ibid., 40.

should be conceived only through individual and private comprehension, or more precisely, by means of self-recognition or through one's own personal experience.[243] The remarks of Lin and Galikowski could indicate the final quality of a politically informed citizen. So far, we have seen the stages that Chinese has gone through: from the steps of recognizing violation of rights, to the formation of critical consciousness and self-awareness to reach the final stage to "reprocess" their thinking. They are getting rid of the ideological reflexes formed by the government and are developing "independent" system of judgment.

For the first time, the Chinese people dare to exercise independent thinking. Yet, the search for political identity is accomplished by exercising their own judgment, as appropriately noted by one Chinese author, "you can search for the ultimate value from your personal experience; what you find is your own interpretation of what the ultimate value is, not the ultimate value itself; and your search is completely personal and none should monopolize the right of such a search."[244] What is implicit in his comments is that a person can exercise his own free will to search and define the truth. The implication is that Falungong members, rather than the authorities, are in command of their own consciousness. There is explicit defiance in such an action.

The events in China clearly indicate a continuing formation of a separate self-identity. Gidden's application of G. H. Mead's theory of "I/me/you" can be used to help make an argument here.[245] Giddens argues that the ability to use 'I' and other associated terms of subjectivity is a condition for the emergence of self-awareness. As he explains,

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[243] Lin Min and Maria Galikowski, *The Search for Modernity (*New York: St. Matin's Press,1999),193.
[244] Ben Xu, *The Disenchanted Democracy,* 51-52.
[245] According to Mead, the 'me' is the identity - a social identity - of which the 'I' becomes conscious in the course of psychological development of the child. The 'I' is, as it were, is the active, primitive will of the individual, which seizes on the 'me' as the reflection of social ties.

"Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography.* Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent. The capacity to use 'I' in shifting contexts, characteristic of every known culture, is the most elemental feature of reflexive conceptions of personhood."[246] The key in Giddens's comments is reflexive activities of an individual. To relate this to the Chinese context, from the discussion of the activities of Falungong members, there is clearly the emergence of independent consciousness, along with free exercise of one's own judgment and individual reflexive activities. This new development indicates the formation and demarcation of a subjective "I" vis-à-vis the collective "we." The focal point here is the development of a self-mechanism.

Conclusion

From the previous discussion, we understand why Falungong has attracted vast numbers of followers. Its rise has been the result of the peculiar conditions of contemporary Chinese society. It performs therapeutic, moral and cultural functions that fill the special needs of the Chinese people in the face of an adverse reality. While, as a religious group, Falungong has been perceived initially as therapeutic, its ideologies and actions are such that it offers the Chinese people a chance to reevaluate their personal worth and to develop a new social epistemology. The case study of the sociological, moral, and cultural appeal of Falungong shows the creative use of religion in modern day.

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[246] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity,* 53.

Belief in religion is not an end in itself. Rather, it becomes a touchstone for Falungong members to serve other needs. In this regard, the notion of culture as a toolbox, as advanced by many western prominent sociologists is helpful. The metaphor of a "symbolic toolbox" now often applied to religion suggests that people may draw selectively from its resources and exercise considerable agency in its interpretation.[247] Marsha Witten, the author of *All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism*, offers an example to support this theory on the thoughtful use of Christianity. Her words can help us reflect on the Falungong movement: "For some contemporary Christians, the symbol of the cross may no longer plausibly refer to the accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as they appear in the gospels. Yet the cross may take on significance in another way as speakers use it to condense and dramatize notions of suffering and its transcendence, or overwhelming love, or the possibilities of human transfiguration."[248] In Witten's sense, in the traditional sense of a religion, the religious symbols represent an overriding and transfixing truth for the believers. There is no cognitive reflection exercised by them. Religious symbols were understood in their literal sense. But in the modern world, religious symbols become free agencies used reflectively by believers to serve their own special purposes. The implicit assumption is that religious experience takes on a sociological value. In the practice of Falungong members, the religious experience enables them to not only transcend personal sentiment and draw strength from it, but also weave coherent and new meanings in the face of human suffering. In other words, spiritual transcendence makes it possible for them to view personal suffering from a different perspective, and to escape from the

[247] Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace,* 170.
[248] Marsha Witten, *All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1993) 29.

constraint of personal tragedies to ascend to a higher plane so that they link the improvement of personal fate with the betterment of the larger social world.

With a discussion of the explication of Falungong's contemporary sociological, moral, and cultural appeals in the present chapter, our attention next is turned to the question of how Falungong has directly challenged the most basic assumptions of the communist government.

Chapter Five

Contesting the Modern Political Culture: Falungong's Departure from Marxist Materialism, Authoritarianism, and Scientism

We have now achieved a better understanding of Falungong's roots in the Chinese religious traditions of Buddhism and Taoism. As a contemporary movement, it establishes its moral appeal by drawing selectively from classical traditions. It borrows from ancient ethical thoughts to build its ideological foundation. In addition, tradition adds weight to the cultural ethos of Falungong - an emerging social group that endeavors to solidify its position in their contention for power with the establishment.

On how Falungong uses the ancient to serve the modern, we have considered what it affirms. We now turn to that which it is arrayed against. As a contemporary dissent movement, Falungong upholds its version of moral rectitude as a critique of certain strains of thought in the hegemonic ideology. Specifically, Falungong dissents from Marxist materialism, authoritarianism and scientism - the major communist beliefs that constitute the contemporary Chinese political culture. It counters them with the practice of religious humanism.

Marxist Materialism

To understand the Chinese leadership's attitude on human beings and their relationship with the social world, one must first get some insights into its basic belief in Marxist materialism. D. W. Y. Kwok, a Chinese historian, provides a succinct definition of materialism: "Materialism is the belief that matter constitutes the only and ultimate reality of the universe. Thought and consciousness are its by-products, and there is

nothing real beneath or beyond matter."[249] From Kwok's definition, we can make some inferences. A believer of materialism is necessarily opposed to idealism. Such a person denies the primacy of subjectivity and human consciousness. By extension, he/she will not attach importance to the issue of humanity.

Mao Zedong, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party, acknowledges in his well-known work, "On Practice" that the Chinese Communist Party believes in Marxist materialism. He says,

> Marxists believe human productive activities are the basic practices that decide all other activities. Human knowledge mainly relies on material productive activities, on understanding nature and its phenomena, characteristics and laws and relationship between humans and nature. Through production, humans came to know their relationship with others. In all societies of class, through different means, members of different classes form relationship of production. This is the source of the development of human knowledge.[250]

Assumptions made here are that (1) the source of human knowledge comes from practice; (2) human subjectivity is subject to social activities; and (3) objectivity is the criterion in judging all matters. These assumptions become precepts that guide all communist beliefsand practices, regarding the relationship base to superstructure.

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[249] D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought: 1900-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 24.

[250] Mao Zedong, "Shijianlun" [On Practice], *Selected Works of Mao Zedong,* 4 vols. (Beijing, Renmin chubandshe, 1969), 1:259-60.

The communist attitude towards religion reveals its belief in materialism. The following is a quote from a document of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Communist Party Congress held in 1979:

> All religions are illusory, erroneous reflections created by humans who experience fear and helplessness when faced by the forces of nature and society. The negative functions of religion become all the more salient as human beings enter a class society, with its exploiting classes and religious professionals. It makes the broad masses of laboring people resign themselves to mistreatment and oppression, submitting to the will of Heaven in the class struggle and their struggle with nature. Therefore, Marxism holds that religion is the opium that drugs the people's spirit, which is used as a tool by the exploiting classes in their domination of the people. Marxists have consistently opposed religion in any form.[251]

This passage clearly illustrates the Marxist attitude toward religion in general. Religion is negative, since it caters to the interests of the exploiting class. It serves no positive purpose, but is the tool for the exploiting class to manipulate the common people. Thus, the Communist leadership describes religion as "reactionary," deeming the practice of it prohibitive in communist China. A communist man reaches the statue of an epiphany: he lives a lifetime overcoming himself to fulfill revolutionary responsibilities. What is

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[251] Donald MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 32-33.

implicit in a communist personality is that it is not guided by feeling, sentiment, and private thought.

Here, the perspective of a reformist Chinese Communist Party member is helpful. Wang Meng, a famed Chinese writer, is critical of the communist version of "unselfish" man. He calls "pseudo-humanism" the attempt to use the imagined utopian "superman" to obliterate human needs and desire.[252] It ignores true living people and upholds the so-called unselfish man. Such an attempt results in people taking on a false identity; leading to hypocrisy. Wang's statements describe the state of affairs in China since 1949. The split personality, the Chinese version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, is common both among the elite and rank-and-filer communist party members in recent years. The unsuccessful attempt to mold a "utopian superman" in real life, while produces, instead, hypocrites testifies to the inaptness of communist ideology.

It is only natural that humanism, which has long been suppressed in China, will emerge when the opportunity arrives. The recent rise of the Falungong Movement is an indication that humanism is emerging in China and is battling against the long held communist doctrine of Marxist materialism. Falungong, with its efforts to restore health to its believers and encourage individual spiritual transcendence makes its ultimate concern the well-being of human beings. Its tenet, belief, practice, and rituals all center on the primacy of personhood. The powerful influence of Falungong lies in the fact that it provides a haven for its believers for self-growth and self-reflection. Thus, Falungong forms a critique to the practice of Marxist materialism by the Chinese leadership.

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[252] Wang Meng, "Renwen jingshen wenti ougan" [Reflection on the Issue of Humanism] in *Renwen jingshen xunsilu* [Writings on Pursuing and Reflecting Humanistic Spirit] (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1996),109.

Not surprisingly, Falungong met stiff opposition from the Chinese leadership, due to the irreconciliable conflict between the ideology of Marxist materialism and Falungong's belief in religious humanism. Here it is necessary to conduct a case analysis of the theories of He Zama, a prominent Chinese Marxian theoretician, who is critical of Falungong. It was, after all, his criticism of the Falungong practice that had initiated the conflict between Falungong followers and the central government.[253]

In May 1998, as Falungong members expressed anger and frustration over the negative report on the movement in the media, He Zama, who had previously criticized it, decided to write an article of the group. In the article, he first argued that the so-called "paranormal capabilities" of practicing Falungong were deceitful. He then recited incidents when devout Falungong practitioners supposedly lost their minds or committed suicide. He ended the article by saying: "In Chinese history, there used to be a famous philosopher by the name of Dai Zeng. He compared the ethics of Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi[254] to 'to kill with ethics.' Now, those promoters of pseudo *qi gong* and special capabilities, the degree they poison youths, are worse than those who kill with ethics [in ancient China]."[255] After the publication of He Zama's article in the popular youth journal *Qing shao nian ke ji bo lan* (A Survey of Science and Technology for Youths), Falungong representatives demanded that the editor of the journal apologize. When their

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[253] For detailed information on how the conflict between Falungong and Chinese central leadership started, see Fu Ningjun, *Kexue zhi jian: He Zama yuanshi* zhuanji [The Sword of Science: A Biography of He Zama] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2000).

[254] Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Cheng Yi (1033-1108) are forerunners of Neo-Confucianism – a revival of Confucianism which was to become dominant during the Song (960-1979) and Ming (1368-1643) dynasties. Zhu and Cheng promote an adherence to social hierarchy, especially the belief that a man should overcome "human desire" to reach enlightenment. To say "To kill with ethics" here refers to the rigidity of the code of ethics upheld by Zhu and Cheng.

[255] He Zama, *Wo bu xinxe: He Zema fan weikexue lunzhanji* [I Do Not Believe in Evil: A Collection of Works by He Zama on Pseudo Science] (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoju chubanshe, 1999), 23-25.

request was refused, 6,300 Falungong believers staged a sit-in in front of its office. The incident ultimately resulted in a large-scale sit-in in Zhong Nan Hai, the headquarters of the Chinese government in Beijing, on April 24, 1999.

He Zama has written extensively on *qi gong* practices. A rhetorical analysis of a few of his key articles will not only reveal his stand on Marxist materialism, but also help us understand how a communist takes treats the issues of humanism, atheism, and science. In his article, "To Practice Superstition and Pseudo *Qi Gong,*" He Zama calls the practice of *qi gong* witchcraft, superstition and pseudo science. He goes on to say: "Our current task is to promulgate dialectical materialism and atheism. We must not relax in our efforts to oppose feudal superstition and any of its variations. We must discern the link between these variations and pseudo-science. In our struggle against witchcraft, pseudo *qi gong,* and feudal superstition, the circle of science and technology is unequivocally responsible."[256] In China, any popular health practice not endorsed by the government is labeled "pseudo-science." It is considered "pseudo science" as it violates the "scientific" Marxism, as is defined by the Chinese leadership. Here, it is important to point out the other accompanying terms used together with "pseudo science." In this discussion, He Zama uses "witchcraft" and "feudal superstition" to connotate his use of the term "pseudo-science." As the term "science" is the equivalent of "truth" as perceived by the Chinese leadership, to be accused of "pseudo science" necessarily means that the health practice becomes the object of public discrimination.

Another common theme found in communist critique of any deviant spiritual practice is the claim that the practitioner has an ulterior motive. As He Zama says in an article entitled " Communists Must Be Atheists": "Now some people with ulterior

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[256] Ibid., 171.

motives manufacture theism, they create new god, or even living god, in the name of religion. They in fact distort laws and regulations in legal religious activities so as to achieve their shady motives. [What is worse,] some communist party members give up their [ideological] weapons in front of the new theism in the disguise of science."[257] He Zama's here repeats the official line of the Chinese leadership. B. Alan Wallace sheds light on our understanding of a dogmatist like He Zama. As Wallace notes, "Eliminative materialists attempt to override experience on purely dogmatic grounds. Dogmatists commonly hold to their view even in the face of the most obvious contrary evidence, and their intransigence may grow all the more zealous when obstacles are met."[258] Wallace informs us of the Weltanschauung of a dogmatic materialist like He Zama, whose vision is so narrow that what he sees is his dogma.

Religion in Contemporary China

Prior to 1949, China had not had systematic churchgoers who regularly went the churches of various denominations. What China had was indigenous and popular religious beliefs carried out in all kinds of forms. As C. K. Yang testifies: "Before the Communist accession to power, the continued belief and fate, the most basic elements in Chinese religion, was indicated by the ubiquitous presence of all varieties of diviners in the country, and by the wide sales of the old Almanac, containing mostly chronometric

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[257] Ibid., 294.

[258] Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 139.

guidance of life. The complex pantheon of functional gods that operated as the long arm of Heaven and fate still retained a strong hold on the people's mind."[259]

Since the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, it had adopted an anti-religion policy. To the leadership, religion in old China had served the interests of the old ruling class and foreign powers, and, therefore, should be eliminated. The following excerpt is from an official document from the Chinese Communist Party stipulating its basic attitude towards religion: "All religions were manipulated and controlled by the ruling class, with extremely negative results. Within China, the Buddhist, Daoist and Islamic leaderships were mainly controlled by the feudal landowners, feudal lords and reactionary warlords, as well as the bureaucratic capitalist class. The foreign colonialist and imperialist forces mainly controlled the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches."[260] To the Chinese leadership, religion, when controlled by the reactionary forces, was like "opium" to poison the mind of the people. With the introduction of Communist ideologies, people should cleanse their minds to convert to the new communist ideology.

The party does not hesitate to propose its stand on the religious belief, as reflected by the following official party document:

> An important constituent of the Party's theoretical work on religion is the use of the Marxist viewpoint and method to carry out scientific research on the religious question. An important task for the Party on the propaganda front is the use of Marxist philosophy to criticize idealism (which includes theism), and to educate

[259] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society,* 341.
[260] MacInnis, *Religion in China Today,* 11.

the masses, especially the broad mass of young people, in a dialectical and historical materialist and scientific world-view. To do this, we must strengthen our propaganda in scientific and cultural knowledge as these relate to an understanding of natural phenomena, the evolution of society, and of human life, with its old age, sickness, death, and ill and good fortune."[261]

The ultimate reason the communist leadership cannot tolerate traditional religion lies in the fact that it perceives communist ideology as a total allegiance and it cannot permit freedom of allegiance. As C. K. Yang explains, "the position of communism towards theistic religion is that of faith encountering faith. Since faith embodies ultimacy, the relation between faiths implied mutual exclusion. Between mutually exclusive bodies, there may be either mutual tolerance or conflict. The latter applies to the nature of the communist faith and its interpretation of religion."[262] To believe sincerely in a faith means one commits total loyalty and surrenders his/her will. The communist party insists on total subjugation of mind and body from both its members and the Chinese people. Thus, it follows that it cannot tolerate religion.

Party policy on religion since the 1980s was to reflect a marked departure from the repressive policies of the Maoist period.[263] The official summary of the Chinese Communist policy on religion in 1982 as "Document 19" stated the basic policy as one of

[261] Ibid., 25.
[262] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society,* 386.
[263] For a synthetic discussion on the change of religious policies by the Chinese leadership since the 1980s, see Pitman B. Potter, "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China," *China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 318-337.

respect for and protection of the freedom of religious belief.[264] The Chinese leadership's change on religious policy was more ceremonial than in essence, as it continued to privilege the freedom not to believe in religion. In 1991, the Chinese Communist Party's "Document No. 6" expressed the regime's policy response that attempted to co-opt religious adherents while also repressing challenge to Party power.[265] The issue of Document No. 6 demonstrates once again the Chinese leadership's retro-active policy responses to the change brought about by the economic reform, namely the religious revival and appearance of large number of religious adherents. In the meantime, the emphasis on loyalty to the Party also showcases the leadership's concern on the increasing challenge on its authority. To the leadership, it is possible to remain faithful to the official orthodoxy while engaging in religious beliefs. The example of Falungong is to prove the official attitude erroneous. Pitman B. Potter sees loyalty to the regime and faithfulness to a religious belief as mutually exclusive, as religious believers own a higher loyalty to their own religious norms that may force a choice between loyalty to the regime and faithfulness to belief. As he notes, "To the extent that policies on regulation of religion require a degree of subservience that is inconsistent with religious conviction, compliance will be elusive. And if enforcement of these policies can be achieved only through repression, the distinction between compliance and resistance may face as religions believers find compliance unworkable."[266]

[264] See "Guanyu woguo shehuizhuyi shiqu zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben zhengce" ("Basic viewpoints and policies on religious issues during our country's socialist period) in Xu Yucheng, *Zhongjiao zhengce falǘ zhishi dawen* (*Responses to Questions about Knowledge of Lau and Policy on Religion*) (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press, 1997).

[265] "Document 6: CCP Central Committee/State Council, circular on some problems concerning further improving work on religion" (5 February 1991), Appendix 1 in Spiegel, "Freedom of Religion in China," 27-32.

[266] Pitman, Potter, "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China," *China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 335.

Falungong, with its political overtones and immense popularity, greatly challenged the allegiance of the Chinese people to the communist ideology. The Chinese leadership cannot condone this. On July 23, 1999, the central leadership issued a statement in the *People's Daily* banning Falungong. As the statement says: "The 'Falun dafa' created by Li Hongzhi spreads idealism and theism; it negates all scientific principles, and is antithetical to modern science and modern civilization. It is in opposition to the Marxist basic theories and principles and the great cause of the construction of the socialism with Chinese characteristics by our Party and the people"[267] This passage illuminates the mutual exclusiveness of the ideological beliefs of the communist world-view and that of Falungong. The political overtones of Falungong are made apparent here.

Yenan: The Origin of the Formation of a Communist Self

Scholars of Chinese Studies are still intrigued by the Chinese Communist Party's victory over the political opposition party Guomintang, establishing its political power in 1949, and maintaining its authoritarian rule until today. In particular, the ability of the Chinese leadership to use rhetoric to turn the Chinese people from the "unproblematic,"[268] to true believers is a worthy case study in the research of language and social influence. The best political accomplishment for the Chinese leadership is characterized by total mobilization and active participation of the populace in social change, and by total political control that penetrates to the grass roots. Tsou Tang, the late

[267] "On Prohibiting Communist Party Members to Practice Falungong," *People's Daily,* June 23, 1999, overseas edition.

[268] I borrowed this term from Maurice Charland's article, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *PEUPLE QUÉBÉCOIS," Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 73 (1987): 133-150. The term "unproblematic" means, both in Charland's article and in my research, unindoctrinated.

Chinese Studies scholar and political scientist, uses the term "political integration" to describe the synchronization of belief and attitude between the elite and the masses. For Tsou, political integration contains two components: the process of social disintegration where old social, economic and psychological commitments are broken, and process of social integration where the development of new patterns of socialization and behavior is made possible.[269]

To relate this section of the chapter to the overall theme of the entire dissertation, there are three considerations. First, Yenan, the political base for the Chinese Communist Party between 1937 to 1947, represents an embryonic stage from which a totalitarian society would grow into. Through a review of the Yenan Rectification Campaign, where Chinese Communist Party leadership led by Mao Zedong eliminated dissidents, we will learn some of the essential rhetorical skills Chinese Communist senior leaders have employed to turn the common Chinese into true revolutionaries. Second, the discussion in this section will help us understand how compliance is forged under the communist leadership. It will reveal the mechanism by which many Communist Party members perform revolutionary deeds of their own accord once they join the Communist Party. Third, the authoritarian practice of the Chinese leadership forms a sharp contrast with the attempts of the Chinese Falungong movement. While the communist leadership cultivates in its members a total commitment to its own cause, Falungong encourages self-growth and self-reflection in its believers.

In 1942, the Chinese Communist Party was becoming an increasingly important political force in the Chinese national arena. The Kuomintang, the major opposition

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[269] Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 4.

party to the Chinese Communist Party, was rapidly losing its popularity among the Chinese people because of its corruption, impotent rule and reluctance to fight against Japanese invaders. Many people came to see the Communist Party as their hope to save China. The party soon experienced a period of vastly expanded membership. Of the party's eight hundred thousand members at that time, ninety percent were recent recruits.[270]

These new recruits created problems for the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The vast majority of new party members were "petty bourgeois, young intellectuals." For example, of the new party members in the Central Research Institute in Yenan, 79 percent were twenty to thirty years old, and 82 percent were urban "intellectuals."[271] These newcomers brought with them not only their hope and enthusiasm in the Chinese Communist Party but also their own theory and belief as to how the Chinese revolution should be won. The Yenan Campaign was launched partly to "ensure the commitment and adequate indoctrination" of these new party members.[272]

Yenan is a terrain on the ground. Political integration was carried out in full fledge and in practical terms. The Yenan Rectification Political Campaign was an essential step to achieve political integration. The campaign lasted from 1942 to 1945, and was also the earliest major political campaign in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. In the campaign, the rank and filers were made to study first important speeches given by Mao Zedong and other high-ranking leaders such as Liu Shaoqi, and then engage in confessions and self-criticism. As a result of the campaign,

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[270] David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), .21.
[271] Ibid., 267.
[272] Stephen Uhalley, *A History of the Chinese Communist Party* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1988), 58.

Mao's leadership was secured. The political discourse of the Chinese Communist Party formally took on an authoritarian nature.

Thus, Yenan was the greenhouse that had bred the authoritarian behavior of the Chinese leadership. David E. Apter and Tony Saich aptly call Yenan the "moral moment" in the history of Chinese communism.[273] The term "moral moment" has physical, spiritual, and political implications. In the physical and the spiritual sense, life in Yenan was primitive and Spartan. Yet, for Yenanites, the rustic setting enhanced the loftiness of the revolutionary goal to transform China. In other words, Yenan became ground zero for a movement that aimed to do nothing less than start the world all over again, far from the centers of civilization. [274] Here, ordinary rank and filers developed a fervor to fight for the Chinese revolution, and the central leadership churned out blueprints for a new communist China. To many Chinese at the time, Yenan had the sacred quality of a New Jerusalem.

The implementation, and to a large degree, the success of the Yenan Rectification Campaign, relied on a revolutionary discourse. The revolutionary discourse was meant as a source of allegiance for party members by linking their precarious personal experiences to a centralized goal so that everyone would thereafter speak the language of revolution. In the process, any vestige of individualism was eliminated. As Apter and Saich aptly point out, "The goal was to create a seamless web of discourse out of which a community would be created according to the rules of collective individualism, a community in which self-enlightenment and knowledge would enhance each individual's sense of well-being and enable each person to believe that his or her

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[273] Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse,* 6
[274] Ibid., 26.

own person was enhanced by the collectivity."[275] The comments of Apter and Saich explicate the crux of the efficacy of the political discourse of the Chinese leadership. The key terms are "self-enlightenment" and "each person was enhanced by the collectivity." Here, coercion is highly nuanced but effective, for it is able to turn top down imposition into a process of self-enlightenment and self-enhancement for the rank and filers. What is coercive would become spontaneous and autonomic.

The Yenan Rectification Campaign offers a good case study of what Bormann calls "rhetorical vision." For a rhetorical study of the political discourse of the rectification campaign will explicate how the Chinese leadership used a revolutionary discourse to turn the rank and filers into true believers. It is a success story of purification and remolding so that Yenanites came to consider themselves as the "chosen" people for carrying out the Chinese revolution.

Another major reason for the undertaking of the campaign was to consolidate Mao Zedong's leadership in the Party.[276] Since 1921, the Chinese Communist Party had been under the directives of the Comintern. Its representatives, either Russians or Chinese trained in the Soviet Union, were sent regularly to Yenan to provide political guidance or head the leading posts of the Chinese Communist Party. Mao, already in an eminent position in the Party, was rather unhappy about the situation. He strove to establish himself as the ultimate Party leader independent of the political direction of the Comintern. As early as 1938, he had suggested that his political theory was the Sinicization of Marxism. He argued that Marxist principles should be used flexibly

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[275] Ibid.,268.
[276] Ibid.

according to the practical conditions of the country to which it was introduced.[277] He contended that the Comintern representatives in the Party tended to be dogmatists, knowing nothing but empty Marxist theories and unable to combine Marxist theory with Chinese conditions. With the growth of his political influence within the Party, Mao helped to launch the Yenan Campaign to get rid of his Comintern political rivals.[278]

The beginning of the campaign was marked by Mao's two speeches, "Rectify the Party's Style of Work" and "Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing," which laid down the guidelines of the campaign. Mao announced that the goal of the campaign was to eliminate "subjectivism" and "sectarianism." He accused the Comintern representatives and the new party members of committing the fallacies of subjectivism and sectarianism. The Comintern representatives practiced subjectivism because they knew nothing but empty Marxist theories about Chinese revolution, and, therefore, could not maintain an objective political perspective. The new party members engaged in sectarianism because their political behaviors were inconsistent with those endorsed by the Party. Mao notes: "Subjectivism, sectarianism and stereotyped Party writing – all three are anti-Marxist and meet not the needs of the proletariat but of the exploiting class. They are a reflection of petty-bourgeois ideology in our Party. China is a country with a very large petty-bourgeoisie and our party is surrounded by this enormous class. A great number of our party members come from this class, and when they join the Party, they inevitably drag in with them a petty-bourgeois tail."[279] The key term in this passage is "petty bourgeoisie," and its connotations are provided by the term "anti-Marxist," and the phrase "meet not

[277] Hu Sheng ed., *Seventy Years in the History of the Chinese Communist Party* (Beijing: The History of CCP Publishing House, 1991), 198.
[278] Uhalley, *A History,*58. Hu Sheng, *Seventy Years,*198.
[279] Mao Zedong, "Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing," in *Collected Works of Mao Zedong*, 509

the needs of the proletariat but of the exploiting class." Since its founding in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party had proclaimed itself to be a proletarian party, serving the common people. Who are the proletarians, then? Mao Zedong provided a definition of the composition of the "proletarians." He considered them to include workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie (including the intellectuals), occupying different rungs in the revolutionary ranks. The workers were the leading class of the revolution; the peasants were the most dependable allies. The urban petty bourgeoisie and the intellectuals were the allies of the revolution, capable of long-term cooperation with the Chinese Communist Party. [280]

However, since the Yenan Campaign, the term "petty bourgeoisie" was used by the Communist Party to refer to intellectuals only and started to take on a derogatory meaning. In the political communication of the party, "petty bourgeoisie" refers to some-one who, though a member of the revolutionary ally in the party's united front against the enemy, is politically swaying and can never be a thorough revolutionary by class origin toward the intellectuals.

The communist negative attitude toward the intellectuals has a great deal to do with the basic characteristics of the Chinese intellectuals. Because of the relatively lower educational level of the general population in China, intellectuals constitute a distinct social class. Though small in number, throughout Chinese history they have played a vital role both politically and sociologically. Author Jerome Grieder makes the following comments about Chinese intellectuals: "We are dealing here with a conspicuous minority who was sufficiently perceptive and pensive to be aware of the push and change and the

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[280] Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yenan Forum of Literature and Art," in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong,* 3: 877-78.

tug of tradition, and sufficiently well educated and self-confident to hold and express opinions about the circumstances in which it found itself."[281] From the time of the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang (246 BC), the ruling class had been particularly sensitive to the outspokenness of the scholars. During his lifetime, the emperor had carried out the infamous "Fengshu Kengru" (burn books and bury scholars) to squelch any dissenting voice and to ensure a smooth run of his totalitarian rule. In the contemporary Chinese society, the Chinese Communist Party, from its early formative years, had inherited the cultural legacy of holding a hostile attitude towards intellectuals. Thus, the political sensitivity of the Chinese intellectuals is often practiced at the expense of their personal safety or even their own lives. In his *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution,* renowned Chinese historian Jonathan Spence makes the following comment about Chinese intellectuals: "[Though] the cultured voices of these Chinese may seem at times too piercing, and gestures too ritualized, they still possess the essential power - denied to the traditional chorus - of leaving the apparently allotted space and marching to the center of the stage. It is often true that those who do this die earlier than the others – 'before their times,' to use a simple phrase."[282] Apparently, when Chinese intellectuals joined the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party, they would continue to be outspoken politically, and thus posed a danger to the totalitarian rule of the Communist Party. Mao Zedong used the Yenan Campaign for a political showdown with them. He made it clear throughout his speeches in the campaign that the "petty bourgeoisie intellectuals," unless ideologically transformed, would always be untrustworthy and occupy the bottom rung of the revolutionary ranks. What is more, he did not hesitate to label

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[281] Jerome B Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China* (New York: Free Press, 1981), x.
[282] Jonathan D. Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895-1980* (New York: Penguin, 1981), xv.

those who spoke critically against the Party as "anti-Marxist" and "representatives of the exploiting class," and, thus, accused them of being the political enemy. This kind of negative attitude toward intellectuals would continue through post-1949 China and had a devastating consequences for the Chinese society.

What were the effects of Mao's accusations on the psychology of the new party members? In other words, what did Mao accomplish symbolically? His characterizations of new party members as "petty bourgeois" with its negative implications was meant to destroy any feeling of self-importance or rather, self-confidence the new party members have about themselves. They were made to feel inadequate and self-doubtful. Indeed, in "How to Be A Good Communist," a required text of political etiquette for new Communist Party members since Yenan, Liu Shaoqi says, "We should see ourselves as in need of change and capable of being changed. We should not look upon ourselves as immutable, perfect and sacrosanct, as persons who need not and cannot be changed. When we pose the task of remolding ourselves in social struggle, we are not demeaning ourselves; the objective laws of social development demand it. Unless we do so, we cannot make progress, fulfill the task of changing society."[283] Liu's remarks shed light on Mao's criticism of new party members. He provides the "legitimate reason" for the new party members to change themselves. The word "change" here has multiple implications. It means remolding and purification. For the new party members, it is a demand to purge their souls.

Liu further provides the reason why the new party members need to change. He says:

[283] Liu Shaoqing, "How to Be a Good Communist" in *Selected Works of Liu Shaoq* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), 1:108.

> We come across many Party members of non-proletarian origin who differ in their development owing to their differing attitude towards the relation between Marxist-Leninist study and ideological self-cultivation. Generally speaking, when they join the revolution, such people do not have a firm and clear-cut proletarian stand, are not very correct or pure in their ideology, and to a greater or lesser extent carry over various non-proletarian ideas from the old society. Obviously, these ideas come into direct conflict with the principles of Marxism and Leninism.[284]

The key terms in this passage are new party members do not have "a firm and clear-cut proletarian stand," and they are not "pure" communists. Liu's criticism augmented Mao's accusation that individuals with "petty bourgeois tails" are "anti-Marxist." New party members are made to feel that though they are already new communist party members, they do not belong to the camp of the "true revolutionary," because they are not "pure" ideologically. They occupy the middle ground. If not changed, they may belong to the camp of enemy. Their only way out is to transform themselves. This kind of rhetoric vilifying the new party members is very powerful. To intellectuals who put their lives in danger so as to come to Yenan to fight the Chinese Revolution, it is a harsh dress down to be told that they are not thorough revolutionaries unless transformed. As they are "true revolutionaries" in their own right, they naturally have a yearning to become "pure" communists as demanded by the Party. Or in rhetorical terms, the call for a "pure" communist becomes a "rhetorical vision" or symbolic reality: it is a linguistic

[284] Ibid.,122.

phenomena introduced into the political discourse. The ideologue dangles a dramatic vision of the "good communist" before the new party members. The new party members are eager to participate in the dramatic vision, to be a "pure" communists as described by the ideologue. Thus, a new stage is set up for the subsequent process of remolding of new party members.

When there are villains, there will be heroes. Who were then the heroes as perceived by the Party? Mao tells us who: "Compared with the workers and peasants, the untransformed intellectuals were not clean. The workers and peasants were the cleanest people, and even though their hands were soiled and their feet smeared with cow-dung, they were really cleaner than the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals."[285] As mentioned earlier, the Chinese leaders have regarded workers and peasants, the so- called "proletariats" as true and dependable revolutionaries. The fact that workers and peasants are considered true revolutionaries has largely to do with their basic political characters. Even though they do not know much about Marxist theories, they possess an abundance of raw political enthusiasm since they are the direct beneficiaries of the Chinese revolution. For the Chinese leadership, the lack of knowledge of the peasants and workers becomes a political advantage, as this group of communists is the easiest to manipulate and least politically outspoken.

For the new party members, workers and peasants, with their attached label of "true revolutionaries" become heroes to be emulated or, to be precise, role models. Here the Chinese leadership's call for intellectuals to follow the footstep of workers and peasants creates a psychodramatic fantasy world. The camp of enemy and the camp of

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[285] Mao Zedong, "Talk at the Yen'an Literature and Art Symposium" in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1969), 3:808.

revolutionary insiders have been clearly defined. New party members, considered as middle roaders by the leadership, must choose his side. As can be expected, most new party members are "eager" to join the camp of revolutionaries. Here, the process to eliminate the last vestige of individualism is complete. The leadership's affirmative attitude towards workers and peasants, and their dubious attitude toward new party members have the additional psychological effect of creating an everlasting self-doubt in the new party members. They have to engage in a perpetual task to transform themselves in order to match up to the standard of revolutionary heroes.

For the Chinese leaders, they feel the need to further drive home the point of political remolding for the new party members. They do so by creating an emotional response. Mao thus points out the political danger new party members, or the so-called "sectarians" pose to the party line: "Sectarianism within the Party leads to the formation of cliques, and hinders conformity and inner party unity. Sectarianism in external Party relations results in centralfugalness and prevents the Party from unifying the people… We must build a centralized, unified Party, make a clean sweep of all unprincipled factional struggles. We must combat individualism and sectarianism so as to enable our Party to march in step and fight for one common goal."[286] The totalitarian tone in this passage is apparent. The key terms are "cliques," "hinder the unity of the Party," "individualism," and "factional struggles." The aim of such rhetoric is to generate a strong emotional impact. Mao intends to create terror by labeling the new party members with such negative names. The new party members, unless transformed and disciplined, are the enemies of the Party. At this point, Mao has been most successful in controlling

[286] Mao Zedong, "Rectify the Party's Style of Work," in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, 3:779-80.

the sub-consciousness of the new party members and preparing them for the subsequent imposition of communist principles.

It comes as no surprise then that the communist central leadership tells the new party members what is an acceptable political behavior of a communist as perceived by the Party. As Liu says, "At all times and on all questions, a Party member should give first consideration to the interests of the Party as a whole, and put them in the forefront and place personal matters and interests second. The supremacy of the Party's interests is the highest principle that must govern the thinking and actions of the members of the Party… Unhesitating readiness to sacrifice personal interests and even one's life for the Party and the proletariat and for the emancipation of the nation and of all mankind – this is one expression of what we usually describe as 'Party spirit,' 'Party sense' or 'sense of organization.'"[287] Here, Liu lays out the condition of being a communist – complete subjugation to the will of the Party. The subjugation has to be total so that one develops the "party spirit," meaning one is ready to die for the communist cause. Liu eliminates any inner tension a new party member may experience: the tension between contrary impulses- the old impulse of the past one has accumulated through the socialization process and new impulse created in the "presence of life." Liu's move to is to control the old impulse so as to unify the common understanding of revolutionary purpose and impose discipline. To be revolutionary is to obey.

Symbolically, Liu has just fashioned what must look like a redeeming process to the new party members. The old self of the new party members has been completely discredited or rather, destroyed by previous official rhetoric. They now have the opportunity to become a new person. Here, the new party members are like phoenixes,

[287] Liu, "How to Be a Good Communist," 136-137.

arising from the ashes after burning to the ground. Or to use the terminology of Apter and Saich, the Yenan experience is like a "suturing process similar to being born again."[288]

In rhetorical terms, we are witnessing the "coming into being" of the rhetorical vision of the "people." Michael McGee describes this stage as the heart of "collectivization process," as it is essentially "a political myth," "a vision of man dangled before persons in the stage of their metamorphosis into a 'people.'" This stage is essential as " it gives specific meaning to a society's ideological commits, and it is the inventional source for arguments of ratification among those seduced by it."[289]

The effectiveness of the official rhetoric is confirmed by testimonies of the party members who participated in the rectification campaign.[290] Those who came from non-proletarian background and who recently joined the Party particularly felt that the rectification campaign was a transformative experience. For example, a new communist party member from an intellectual background, summarized her experience from the campaign by saying that Rectification became a means for her to revolve the tension between her class background and the appropriate way to connect to the Chinese people. Once she had made the connection with the Chinese people, she was able to understand how Marxism-Leninism, as a body of universal truths and methods, would show how Chinese revolution could be realized. For her, study was itself a form of fulfillment. The idea of communism being the final stage of evolution represented a symbol she could fill

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[288] Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse,* 179.

[289] Michael McGee, "In Search of the 'People:' A Rhetorical Alternative," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader,* ed. John Lucaites (New York: Guildford Press, 1999), 346.

[290] Apter and Saich interview quite a few number of surviving communist party members who participated in the Yenan Rectification Campaign. They all expressed the view that the campaign was a transformative experience. For detailed information, see Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse,* 141-83.

up because it was intrinsically empty. She could convert all her yearning into a powerful unity of self and community, China and world, according to dialectical rules of transformation. Yenan enabled her to arrive at what might be called a "symbolic infinitude."[291]

The above passage demonstrates the "new" inner world of a transformed communist party member. Several messages come through her comments. She apparently has discarded her class origin and is willing to emulate the "Chinese people." In addition, she acknowledges Marxism and Leninism, i.e. the Party version of them, as the universal truth. Finally, she sees herself as unified with the Party and communist cause both emotionally and rationally. Here, the conversion is complete. Symbolically, a "good" communist becomes an objectified reality. From her success story, we get a better grip on how the "moral capital" of Chinese revolutionaries has been constituted.

As the Party has successfully created a "people," it delivers the last punch to impel them to action. Liu thus rallies the transformed party members to the cause of communism. He says: "What is our most fundamental duty as Party members? It is to achieve communism. As far as the Communist Party of different countries are concerned, in each country, it is for the Communist Party and the people there to transform it by their own efforts, and in that way, the whole world will be transformed into a communist world."[292] At this point, the call for the party members to fight for communism is quite appropriate. With the completed ideological transformation, the new party members now feel growing in themselves what McGee calls the "inner ardent wish" to make contributions to the Party. The positive emotional response comes after

[291] Ibid., 155-56.
[292] Liu, "How to Be a Good Communist," 129.

the rational understanding. Or to view it from a rhetorical point of view, this process explains why the newly minted party members are "eager" to become part of the grand plan of the Party.

It is also pertinent here to assess the rhetorical effect of Liu's technique to bring the drama into a grand finale. Konrad Heiden, the author of *Der Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power,* makes an excellent comment on the rhetorical force of Hitler's incendiary speeches, which help to shed light on the official rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party. As Heiden notes: "[Hitler's] speeches begin always with deep pessimism and end in overjoyed redemption, a triumphant happy ending; often they can be refuted by reason, but they follow the far mightier logic of the subconscious, which no refutation can touch."[293] We should note the similarity the Chinese Communist Party shares with the rhetorical technique of Hitler. Like Hitler, the Chinese also start with the negative, the severe denouncement of the new party members. The official rhetoric goes on a continuum to more positive statements to reach a grand finale. The new party members are perceived from an outsider to an insider. The emotional chain of response these members go through from the onset to the end of the rectification campaign could be surmised as shock, incredulity, pessimism, remorse, redeeming, motivation to enthusiasm. The emotional revolution, accompanied with rational understanding, undergirds the total conversion of these party members from the "middle roaders" to "pure" communists.

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[293] Korad Heiden, *Der Fuehrer: Hilter's Rise to Power,* trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1944), 106.

The Yenan Campaign was a political victory for Mao Zedong. He not only succeeded in securing his leadership in the Party but also established his political style of autocratic rule. In 1943, the term "Mao Zedong Thought" was, for the first time, put forward, which would, hereafter, become a key term in the political discourse of the Chinese Communist Party. Since the Yenan Rectification Campaign, the term "Mao Zedong Thought" has become a metonymy of the progress of the Chinese leadership in turning the Chinese people into a nation of political fanatics. At Yenan, the official acceptance of "Mao Zedong Thought" in the revolutionary discourse synecdochycally signifies the achieved allegiance of the entire Party members to Mao Zedong's ideology. In later periods in China, the term would take on the connotations of "beacon," "compass," "telescope," and "touchstone," thus elevating Mao onto a pedestal of God. In terms of political communication, it becomes a catalyst between the Party and the people: the Party would use the term to rally the people and incite them to engage in further extreme political activities; and the people would use it to demonstrate their political loyalty and identification with the Party. In this sense, the Yenan experience has planted the seed for the later growth of China into a totalitarian society.

Hu Sheng, a prominent Chinese Marxian theoretician, makes the following summary about the Yenan Recfitication Campaign:

> The whole party, particularly the senior party leaders, has achieved ideological unity in their viewpoints regard fundamental issue of Chinese revolution on the basis of Marxism-Leninism… To win the victory of the Chinese revolution, the Party must follow Mao Zedong Thought as the political guideline, which

combines Marxism-Leninism with Chinese revolutionary practice. Since [the Yenan Campaign, the Chinese Communist Party has walked on a correct road of self-reliance and Sinicization of basic Marxist principles.[294]

Hu's comments, summarize, in a jist, the main results, or the "victories" of the Yenan Rectification Campaign. The ideological unity is achieved among party members, and the Sinicization of Marxist theories, i.e. Mao's version of Marxism, is accepted. It is true to say that these results would not have been possible without the powerful political rhetoric of the Chinese leadership, particularly that of Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqing. For on the one hand, their political rhetoric has brought about successfully prescribed behavior in Yenanites, particularly for new party members; on the other hand, it played an instrumental role in shaping the political socialization process of the Chinese Communist Party in later years. The Yenan Rectification Campaign came to represent the embryonic stage of a totalitarian society into which post-1949 China would develop.

Scientism

Science in the 20th century has been perceived by scientists and the public alike as offering solutions to problems in the social world. This attitude of giving science authority over culture is called scientism. As Kwok explains: "Scientism, in general, is a form of beliefs arising from a tradition or heritage in which the limiting principles of science itself have found general application and have become the cultural assumptions and axioms of that culture. More strictly, scientism should be defined as that view which

[294] Hu Sheng, *History of the Seventy Years,* 202.

places all reality within a natural order and deems all aspects of this order, be they biological, social, physical, or psychological, to be knowable only by the methods of science."[295] Here, science takes on what Kwok terms "a doctrinal finality", improbable for any essentially human situations.[296] Author Tom Sorell also gives a definition of scientism, which sheds more light on the so called "doctrinal" nature of scientism: "Scientism is the belief, that science, especially natural sciences, is the most valuable part of human learning – the most valuable part because it is the most authoritative, or serious, or beneficial."[297]

What is it in science that it is deemed "most authoritative, serious or beneficial?" To answer this question, we have to learn the symbolic qualities human beings have given to science. In his influential essay "The Ultimate Terms," Richard Weaver considers science as a god term, for it is frequently organically linked with "fact" and more importantly, "truth." Weaver thus explains the positive relationships between science, fact, and truth: "Quite simply, fact came to be the touchstone after the truth of speculative had been replaced by the truth of empirical investigation. Today, when the average citizen says 'it is a fact,' he means that he has the kind of knowledge to which all other knowledge must defer… The 'fact' of his case carries with them this aura of scientific irrefutability. In his vocabulary, a fact is a fact, and all evidence so denominated has the prestige of science."[298] Here, the underlying idea is the verification that a scientific investigation can result in. What is derived is a sense of objectivity

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295 Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought,* 21.
296 Ibid., 200.
297 Tom Sorell, *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.
298 Richard Weaver, "Ultimate Terms" in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 215.

science is associated with. This character of science establishes its positive relationship with fact and truth. Furthermore, we infer when citing scientific facts, the person is fundamentally interested in the credibility and infallibility he/she associates with the usage.

In contemporary China, the Chinese leadership has assumed an attitude of scientism in its modernization drive. Since 1978, China has been undergoing a drive to modernize its industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense. The Chinese leadership perceives the introduction of science and technology as "the new revolutionary force to push the Chinese society forward."[299] The following remark by Chinese political scientist Su Shaozhi is representative of the perception of the Chinese leadership about the sociopolitical role of science and technology in Chinese society: "In the tide of change in the present world, the qualitative change of the social productive forces – a new scientific and technological revolution – is the basis of the entire transformation. Without a doubt, the new technological revolution will certainly exert a deep and extensive influence on society, economy, politics and culture."[300] In this passage, the attitude of scientism is apparent. To the Chinese leadership, science and technology are useful not only in realizing the modernization of the country, but are instrumental in initiating changes in the superstructure. The introduction of science and technology is seen as a new productive force, which makes it possible to give a face lift to the entire Chinese society.

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[299] Xu Liangying, *Science and Socialist Construction in China* (Armonk, N. Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), 211.

[300] Quoted in Shiping Hua, *Scientism and Humanism: Two Cultures in Post-Mao China (1978-1989)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 68.

Chinese leadership uses science and technology in such a way so as to aid communism. Generally speaking, the leadership has used the pretext of science to provide legitimacy to its rule, to ignore human interests and to control the mind of the Chinese people. Yet, the attitude of scientism assumed by the Chinese leadership is mostly reflected in one prominent area: to use the excuse of science to deny human consciousness. Murray Rothbard thus comments on the harm of scientism in denying human will and consciousness: "The key to scientism is its denial of the existence of individual consciousness and will. This takes two main forms: applying mechanical analogies from the physical sciences to individual men, and applying organismic analogies to such fictional collective whole as "society." The latter course attributes consciousness and will, not to individuals, but to some collective organic whole of which the individual in merely a determined cell. Both methods are aspects of the rejection of individual consciousness."[301] To apply mechanical principles to human situations means the denial of the existence of human subjectivity; the application of organismic analogies emphasizes collectivity to minimize the importance of an individual. Here, the relevance of Rothbard's remarks to the Chinese context is apparent. Since its founding in 1927, the Chinese Communist Party has insisted on its belief in Marxist materialism. To deny individuality and human subjectivity has helped to consolidate the totalitarianism of the communist rule. Now, scientism, with its emphasis on objectivity over human subjectivity is seen as complementary to the communist rule.

The practice of scientism by the Chinese leadership has particular significance in contemporary China. As the Chinese people are increasingly beginning to be aware

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[301] Murry Rothbard, "The Mantle of Science," in *Scientism and Values*, eds. Helmut Schoeck and James W. Wiggins (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1960), 165.

the centrality of personality in the Chinese political practice, as reflected by the discussion of humanism and alienation of socialism by the intellectuals in the 1980s[302] and the recent development of Falungong movement, to deny or to foreground the position of a person in the political tradition of China is becoming a point of tension in contemporary Chinese politics. At this critical juncture, the emergence of a popular religion, as represented by the Falungong movement, can be seen as an endeavor to challenge the prevalence of values of scientism promoted by the Chinese leadership, and to assert the importance of human interest.

The Practice of Scientism by the Chinese Leadership in China

Since 1978, when China implemented the modernization drive, the Chinese leadership has adopted a policy favorable to developing science and technology. The beginning of the adoption of such a policy was announced in a speech given by Deng Xiaoping at the National Science and Technology Conference in March 18, 1978. In the speech, Deng pointed out the role science and technology were to play in the nation's modernization drive: "In twentieth century, it is the historical task of the people of our country to realize the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense and science and technology, and to build our nation into a modernized and strong nation of socialism… Under the condition of the proletarian dictatorship, if we do not carry out modernization, if we do not raise the level of science and technology, if the social productive force is not developed, the power of our country won't be strengthened; our socialist political system and economic system will not be solidified; the security of our

[302] For detailed information on this nation wide discussion, see, for example, Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkerly: University of California Press, 1996).

country will not be protected."[303] Deng's speech created the basis for the Chinese leadership to pursue its science policy since then. Yet, if we read between lines, we see that Deng has attributed to science an omnipotent power: while the use of science will make modernization possible, it will also provide a solution to all problems in the political realm. Deng's speech has demonstrated an attitude of scientism.

Deng's attitude of scientism was to be echoed by his successor, Jiang Zemin. On May 26, 1995, Jiang gave a speech at the National Science and Technology Conference to emphasize the continuation of the science policy of the Chinese leadership. Jiang says: "It is a far-reaching and monumental revolution to insist on science and technology as the primary productive force, and to move economic construction on the track of relying on scientific progress and improving the quality of the labor force. If we do so, we not only raise productive force, but also initiate fundamental changes in production and superstructure."[304] Jiang's speech is, apparently, a continuation of the science policy drawn up by Deng Xiaoping. Yet, there are several notable changes. First, Jiang has toned down a great deal the emphasis on the link between communist ideology and science and more toward pragmatics. (This quality may well point to the technocratic background of the third generation of the Chinese leadership, as represented by Jiang). Second, there is the proposal that the promotion of science can lead to changes in the superstructure. In other words, the Chinese leadership presupposes that science can solve problems in the social world. Again, Jiang's speech has demonstrated an attitude of scientism.

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[303] Wei Chengsi, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai kexue sichao: 1949-1991* [Contemporary Chinese Scientific Trend of Thought: 1949-1991] (Shanghai: Sanlian Shudian, 1993), 557.
[304] Ibid., 598.

Then how is scientism practiced by the Chinese leadership? First and foremost, the Chinese leadership uses the development of science to aid its totalitarian practice. In communist ideology, the insistence on the belief of Marxist materialism is a prominent feature. The Chinese leadership sees science as complementary to its belief in Marxist materialism. For example, in its denunciation of Falungong, the Chinese leadership clearly states a positive and complementary relationship between Marxist materialism and science. As a *People's Daily* editorial says: "The political belief of our communist party is science. It is truth uncovered by Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism. It is in accordance with the developing law of history. It reflects synecdochically the basic interest of the Chinese people. Therefore, we must insist on a strict administration of our Party, insist on the scientific world-view of Marxism, insist on materialism and atheism and oppose idealism and theism."[305] To the Chinese Communists, science can perform the function of fulfilling the need of human spirituality. This has led to the denunciation of the Falungong Movement by the Chinese leadership. From the onset, rather than seeing Falungong as fulfilling the needs of human spirituality, the Chinese leadership has denounced Falungong as "pseudo-science," "feudal dross," and "fake religion." To criticize Falungong effectively, the Chinese leadership calls for "education of Marxist materialism and atheism," and "the education of scientific knowledge and scientific spirit."[306] The attitude of the Chinese leadership towards Falungong reflects a mentality of what Kwok calls as "stressing science's role as

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[305] "Jianchi congyan shidang" [Insist on a Strict Administration of Our Party] *People's Daily,* July 26, 1999,overseas edition.

[306] "Yingzao wenming kexue de shehui huangjing" [To Create a Social Environment of Civilization and Science] *People's Daily,* August 12, 1999, overseas edition.

a cultural system and as a model for general social values."[307] To the mind of Chinese leadership, science not only can develop the Chinese economy, but also can address problems in the realm of spirituality. Here, the Chinese leadership clearly views both aspects of life, idealism, and reality as one. Kwok comments on the designated dual role of science for the practioner of scientism: "The task of science was to discover the realities of life and to examine the ambitions of desire of man, the social being. Science, further, was to find the means to satisfy theses ambitions, desires, and needs. Science had the dual role of making clear the realities and realizing the ideals of human life."[308] The belief in scientism reveals a methodological attitude of the Chinese leadership possesses toward the social world.

Since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping succeeded in the leadership of the Chinese communist party, the party's claim to legitimacy of the post-Mao era has required new strategies of persuasion. The demonstration of superior moral characters is one such attempt. The association with science makes it possible for the Chinese leadership to seemingly acquire superior moral characters, for the image of the scientific character is replete with virtue. As John Hedley Brooke points out, a scientific prophet has the qualities of "seriousness of purpose, dedication, the absence of self-interest, unswerving allegiance to truth, fortitude, and conscientiousness, even righteousness."[309] These qualities may belong to a "serious" science promoter, but they are also the qualities the Chinese leadership clamors.

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[307] Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought,* 53.
[308] Ibid., 158.
[309] John Brook, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 337.

The belief of the Chinese leadership in scientism actually supports a dualistic outlook. "For the committed communist," writes John W. Young, "it is not plurality but duality that governs the globe. Every problem, every argument, every issue resolves itself ultimately into two sides, and only two: 'a bourgeois' and 'socialist' side. And in these conflicts there can be no neutrals."[310] Commenting on the practice of science in China, Pye makes the following observation: "Instead of having the liberating effect it did in the West, in China, science has become a new orthodoxy for a stated-supported technocratic elite. The Chinese political approach to science and technology has an absolutist character; it is assumed that there is always a single, best answer to all technical problems... Chinese political leaders have refused to recognize that technical problems usually have multiple solutions, and that choosing among them involves the clash of values and power inherent in competitive politics."[311] The practice of scientism reveals a rigid world-view. In *Nature and Experience,* John Dewey uses the terms of "wholesale generalization," "stable and constant," "eternity," and "permanence" to describe a traditional philosophical view of the world. But these terms are quite appropriate to describe the attitude of scientism.[312]

The practice of scientism by the Chinese leadership also involves a moral outlook. Bϕrge Bakken comments on the link between morality and scientism: "Under the protection of the magic spell of science, the sorcerers of modernity seems to make norms stop fluctuating, morality freeze, and 'correctness' flow abundantly in a kingdom of reason. The kind of social and cultural engineering and disciplinary technology in

[310] Young, John W. *Totalitarian Language: Orwell's Newspeak and Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991.
[311] Lucian Pye, "The State and the Individual: An Overview Interpretation." In *The Individual and State in China.* ed. Brian Hook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 41.
[312] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958).

China today describe a mixture of moralism and scientism. Both can be seen as instruments to control and bring order into the modernization process."[313] Bakken's view points out the danger of applying scientism in the political arena. Scientism, with its monolithic worldview, cannot tolerate the complexity, fluidity, and change that characterize modern day politics.

With such a rigid worldview, the Chinese leadership can only dismiss the Falungong movement as "spreading superstition," and Falungong believers as "losers" who "cannot adjust to the fierce competition of the modern world."[314] And yet, the rise of Falungong, can be seen, in part, as a strong outcry against the prevalent practice of scientism by the Chinese leadership, which negates human spirituality. Whereas scientism insists on knowing the world through rational knowledge, Falungong is making a strong attempt to know about the world through a different method. We can learn this from the preface of *Zhuan Fa Lun*. As Li says, "Now the guiding ideology of human science can only limit its development and research in the material world. It walks on a road of studying a thing only after it is known. It dares not treat those phenomena which cannot be seen or touched, but which exists in a material way... If human kind can know about itself and the universe anew, it will reach a new level. 'Buddhist doctrine' can provide answers about the immeasurable and limitless world for the human kind."[315] The passage has a strong flavor of mystical religious touch. Yet, Li makes it very clear his religious doctrine is an opposition of the so-called "know it all scientific practice" of in the contemporary Chinese society. Reflecting on this view, Shang Jiuyu, from Beijing

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[313] Bakken, *Exemplary Society,* 53.

[314] "Falu bixu zhanshen xiejia" [Law Must Defeat Cult], *People's Daily*, December 22,1999, overseas edition.

[315] Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Fa Lun,* 2.

Normal University, makes the following comment on the learning and knowing functions of religion: "On rational knowledge of human kind, there are always many things that are not knowable within the confines of knowledge, and there are many questions that cannot be explained. The inability of rationality to answer these questions has left room for human imagination. Thus religion has taken advantage of the way of imagination to provide a method of knowledge for the human kind, to answer questions about nature, society and human world."[316] Shang holds that even in modern time, religion plays a useful role that cannot be replaced by science. In this sense, he and those in the Falungong movement are at odds with state doctrine. To acknowledge such a way of knowing things is antithetical to the worldview of scientism.

Perhaps the most harm that the attitude of scientism does to the Chinese society is its tendency to suppress human needs. This is where the relevance of Falungong movement comes in. The rise of Falungong can be seen as the response of the Chinese society to the current sociopolitical situation of China. The Chinese government's attitude of scientism is clearly reflected in its view on Falungong. Rather than studying the timing of its rise and its immense popularity, the Chinese government simply dismisses Falungong movement as being formed by "losers" who cannot adapt to the changes brought about by modernity. As an editorial of *People's Daily* testifies: "Occurrence of cults in contemporary society, whether it is 'Waco' or 'Falungong,' whether it happens in Europe and the United Sates, or in China, it is the product of a historical period. There is nothing unusual about the phenomena. In modern society, there has to be a certain number of people who cannot survive the fierce competition, and

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[316] Shang Jiuyun, "On the Function of Religion," 54.

who wonder onto the wrong road because they cannot acknowledge and tolerate the values of the modern society."[317] This passage represents typically the general attitude of the Chinese leadership toward the disadvantaged group in the reform. This attitude of scientism has been as the main cause of social unrest of the contemporary China, as the vast number of disadvantaged Chinese is struggling for basic subsistence.

It is during this period of near crisis that Falungong has risen to perform a needed role for the disadvantaged Chinese. Falungong, as a religious group, performs healing roles for those people who need to find a sanctuary where they can address their pain and grievances. Shang Jiuyu talks about the usefulness a religion can perform in a distressful human situation. As he explains, "Everyone will come across unfortunate matters such as set backs and failures. As a result, he/she will develop negative feelings of frustration, loss of hope or even fear. If such negative feelings are not appropriately addressed, the person may harm him/herself or even attack the society and harm other people. Religion seeks punitive justice, and it teaches believers to exercise patience and obedience, and forgo materials desires so as to pursue spiritual fulfillment and happiness in afterlife. These teachings increase believers' ability to withstand hardships, help rid pain and fear, balance their mental health and stabilize their sentiments."[318] Shang has pointed out the general efficacy a religion play in a social world, and the reason behind the immense appeal of Falungong to the common Chinese in particular.

[317] "Falu bixu zhanshen xiejia" [Law Must Defeat Cult], *People's Daily*, December 27, 1999, overseas edition.
[318] Shang Jiuyun, "On the Function of Religion," 56.

Chapter Six

Falungong's Challenge to the Social Order of China

The previous chapter exposited Marxist materialism, authoritarianism, and scientism. The Chinese leadership practices these to facilitate the formation of a political culture that emphasizes conformity to the communist cause and sacrifice of the interest of the individual to that of the collectivity. In this regard, materialism, authoritarianism, and scientism all share a commonality in that they aim to eliminate human sentiment and individual will, and ultimately dismiss the significance of human beings. To capture the essence of this spirit, we coin a term "authoritarian scientism" to guide the following discussion.

Falungong, with its beliefs and practices, is antithetical to the communist "authoritarian scientism." It makes a contribution to humanism by striving for human happiness, celebrating human potency, and lending a hand to the weak. However, Falungong's critique of authoritarian scientism is indirect and implicit in that we do not find in its texts any open discussions of the harm of authoritarian scientism. Yet, as consistent with the Chinese cultural tradition, the "implicit" sometimes carries more weight than the "explicit." Using a line of argument peculiar to a spiritual group, Falungong promotes the value of human capabilities, and thus indirectly criticizing the communist practice of minimizing human significance.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is a discussion of Falungong's contribution to humanism and its critique of authoritarianism. Then with a conceptual understanding of Falungong's link to humanism, the second part of the discussion talks about how Falungong members symbolically protest against the

authoritarian scientism by developing self-respect and rights. The last part of the discussion is about Falungong's implication for Chinese social culture.

Humanism vs. Authoritarian Scientism

"Authoritarian scientism" forms a sharp contrast to humanism. On the essence of humanism, Qu Weiquo provides an apt summary. As he notes, "the so-called 'humanism,' usually refers to human understanding and grasp of their own fate; it refers to the thinking of the existence of human kind and of human value... the center of the issue is the fate of human beings."[319] Qu Weiguo's definition of humanism has a strong Chinese flavor. The absence of humanism in China under the Chinese leadership is mainly demonstrated in the lack of control of Chinese people of their own fate. Liu Peiqi proposes how humanism is usually expressed in a social setting: "Humanism pays special attention to study human beings from an emotional angle. It emphasizes the expression of the sentiment and will of human beings through literature, arts and ethics."[320] Liu Peiqi's comments are relevant to the Chinese situation. As humanism is never fully developed as an ethical system in traditional China, the main task of contemporary social and religious leaders is to promote humanism in the arena of ethics.

The absence of humanism has different manifestations in different time periods in Chinese history. Xing Long lists three areas as the lack of humanism in traditional China an individual subjectivity, the unity of rights and duty and the supplanting of rule

[319] Qu Weiguo, "Weiji or Jinbu?" [Crisis or Progress?] in *Renwen jingsheng xunsilu* [Writings on Pursuiing and Reflecting on Humanistic Spirit] (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1996), 101.

[320] Liu Peiqi, "Renwen zhuyi yu lixing zhuyi zhi bijiao"[A Comparison between Humanism and Rationalism], *Reference Teaching to Middle School History* 11(2002): 33.

by law with law by human beings.[321] Wang Meng argues that during the period of planned economy under the leadership of the Chinese government, there exits "pseudo" humanism. It is considered pseudo because by "ignoring and obliterating human needs and desire so as to promote a utopian 'super man,' it dismisses the real and live human being."[322] On the ideal personality for the contemporary China, Yuan Weishi argues, "A meek sheep should not be a signature of the ideal personality of the Chinese people." The new generation of Chinese should be independent persons who "not only abide by the law, but also know how to safeguard his/her rights."[323]

Along with the emergence of many new thoughts since China implemented the economic reforms, struggle for humanity from the government began to surface in 1990s. This is in part evidenced in the appearance of increasingly frequent anti-government actions, such as labor unrest, tax riots, and popular petitions and lawsuits against the government. Yet, just as in the early development of any new thought, for the ordinary Chinese, the understanding of humanity as a concept is rudimentary and vague. Their actions against the mistreatment of the Chinese leadership are more instinctual than politically inspired. Falungong is a good example to illustrate this point. Falungong claims that its main goal is to provide healing and therapy for the disadvantaged Chinese. Though it possesses a distinct humanistic bent, Falungong never develops a clear and open argument on the understanding of humanism. Rather, its beliefs and practices are naturally informed by religious humanism innate to traditional Chinese religions of Taoism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, Falunong has made significant contributions to

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[321] Xing Long, "Gouzao kaifang de renwen jingshen" [Create an Open Humanism], *Kexue, jishu yu bianzhengfa,* no.12 (2002): 13.
[322] Wang Meng, "Renwen jingshen,"109.
[323] Yuan, Weishi, "Renwen jingshen zai zhongguo: cong gen jiuqi" [Humanism in China: Save it from the Roots] in *Renwen jingsheng xunsilun,*199.

humanism. It introduces to its believers a cultural climate that emphasizes the significance of human beings. By implication, it criticizes the communist practice of authoritarian scientism.

Falungong's Contribution to Humanism

Strive for Human Happiness

As early as 1961, C. K. Yang had made predictions about the inadequacy of the Communist ideology to substitute the role of religion. As he explains: "Communism's probable inability to cope with all social and personal crises that may arise in the future would compel the people, when subjected to extreme distress, to continue to reach beyond the finitude of empirical experience and rational thought for relief."[324] History has proven the far-sightedness of Yang's prediction. Falungong, with its strong humanistic bias, is performing a role that the communist leadership has not been able to.

Since ancient times, because of peculiar sociopolitical conditions, Chinese religions took on strong humanistic orientations. As C. K. Yang explains the role of Chinese religions: "[Chinese] religion is designed to deal with ultimate matters of human life such as the tragedy of death, unjustifiable sufferings, unaccountable frustrations, uncontrollable hostilities that threaten to shatter human social ties, and the vindication of dogmas against contradictory evidences from realistic experience."[325] Here, we see that Chinese religions are strongly linked to the life condition of the common people. When the oppression of the ruling class is too much, religions provide a haven for them to find relief and consolation. Such matters transcend the conditional, finite world of empirical

[324] C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society,* 404.
[325] Ibid., 9.

and rational knowledge. To cope with them as an inherent part of life, man is impelled to seek strength from faith in such non-empirical realms as spiritual power inspired by man's conceptions of the supernatural.

Andrew Chin, author of *Chinese Religious Humanism*, further expands on the humanistic tone of Chinese traditional religions: "[The Chinese religion] is 'humanistic' because its sole concern is man's self-fulfillment and his ultimate happiness. Unlike other ideals, [Chinese idealism] has nothing to do with divine revelations. It is simply man's experience of life. It begins with the observation of life and the desire to live a better life. But it ends with the sublimation of its practitioners towards the highest perfection of the absolute happiness. Like all ideals, it is a search for the highest good; unlike all ideals, the highest good does not lie in the supernatural, but rather in the reflection of the fundamental trivia of living."[326] Thus, the traditional religions of China are deemed as humanistic because they foreground the well-being of a personhood in their principles and practices.

The contemporary Falungong movement inherited the humanistic values of the traditional religions. For like the traditional religions of Taoism and Buddhism, Falungong aims to help the common people to deal with social ills. The movement puts emphasis on self-nurturing, self-fulfillment, and the achievement of happiness. This is reflected in the teachings of Master Li to "rid unwanted desires and to strengthen the body and mind." The fact that Falungong has attracted believers is that by practicing the rituals of Falungong, they are able to change their mental and physical health, cure

[326] Andrew Chin, *Chinese Humanism: A Religion beyond Religion* (Taipei: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 1981).

difficult illness, and rid their mental distress and physical pain. The attempt of Falungong to always place human interest in the forefront of its practice forms a stark contrast with the current practice of scientism by the Chinese leadership that suppresses human needs.

In contemporary China, the Chinese leadership practices authoritarian scientism to facilitate communist rule. The Falungong movement has risen, in part, to critique this hegemonic ideology. Thus, the core of the struggle between the Chinese communist leadership and Falungong is about suppressing or foregrounding personhood in their political practice. Zhang Fuping points out the contrastive values between authoritarian scientism and humanism, "[Authoritarian] scientism, with its sole emphasis on the material world, negates the human spiritual needs, which results in the loss of the human subjectivity, and dismemberment and break-up of human spirit… [In contrast], humanism seeks beauty and deviates from material interest when necessary. Through influencing the human view on the world, it attempts to adjust the human view on life in general; through changing the human mental state, it re-molds the subjectivity of a human being."[327] Scientism minimizes human interests whereas humanism centers humans as its focal attention. The rise of Falungong, with its distinct humanist bent, alerts us to an emerging trend in the Chinese society: it has become more and more pressing to address human interests. While the government still insists on implementing a policy of authoritarian scientism, societal forces are rising to push for more humanistic changes.

[327] Zhang Fuping, "Fuyu rensheng yi jiazhi he yiyi: yeshuo renwen jingshen" [Give Values and Significance to Human Life: Also on Humanism] *Henan Shehui Kexue,* no. 5 (1999): 28-33.

Human Potency

The biggest fallacy of authoritarian scientism is to dismiss the significance of human beings. As an implicit critique to this belief, Li Hongzhi proposes to celebrate the potency of human beings. In his theory, Li Hongzhi fully demonstrates the strength of a human being, and champions his/her subjective power. According to him, human beings, once becoming moral, can develop supernormal abilities that enable them to perform a variety of tasks that ordinary people are unable to.

As Li believes, when his practitioners ascends to higher spiritual planes, they become increasingly "assimilated to the cosmos" and will develop "supernormal abilities," which Li sees as the "instinctual abilities of the human body" that had degenerated as human society became more and more developed.[328] When they become advanced cultivators, the practitioner's third or "celestial" eye will open. The celestial eye enables the practitioner to see what X-ray, CT, and "supersonic" scanners see – and more. With it, a practitioner can see through human bodies and walls as well as many otherwise invisible phenomena, including "other time-spaces" and Li Hongzhi's "Law bodies" (*fashen* – images of Li) that are standing "just beside" the practitioner. A practitioner will also be able to see Li's books as "very colorful and golden shiny," with each word in the book bearing the image of his law bodies.[329] Other supernormal powers include those of not getting wet in the rain, the "celestial ear," psycho kinesis, teleportation, "psychic travel," "transmigration," "fixing power," and levitation.[330]

The final goal of cultivation practice is to "become God" or Buddha." Having surrendered all our attachments, the mind becomes empty. Not only are our bodies in

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[328] Chang, *Falungong,* 83.
[329] Ibid., 83.
[330] Ibid., 84.

this dimension (which Li calls *zhu yuanshen:* chief spirits) transformed into a Buddha's body, the bodies in all the other dimensions (which he calls *fu yuanshen:* secondary spirits) also "are all changing." As Li says," When a cultivator has attained the Way… and achieved enlightenment, he will belong to the category of the enlightened or supernatural beings." For what is god but a being that is free of human attachments? To maintain that status, however, the cultivator must continue "to do good things all the time." If he commits evil, "he will come down again" and cease to be a god. Worse still, his "life will be in danger immediately."[331]

Life as a god who still lives in human society, however, will not be easy. Although the advanced cultivator will be blessed with good health and a long extended life, it is a lonely life. As described by Li Hongzhi: "You'll find that those who have a common language with you are very few. On this score alone, you'll feel very lonely and find it kind of bitter in your heart… You seem to have less common words and fewer contacts with ordinary people, even including your family members. But this is all normal… because you are more a God than an ordinary person… [and] are not attached to what human beings are attached to; you'll get bored by what human beings take delight in talking about… You'll know everything that others are thinking. Then, you cannot put up with a single thought of others… and you feel annoyed."[332] Li Hongzhi's theory on supernormal abilities has been accused by the Chinese communist theoreticians as "gibberish." Yet, upon a close rhetorical examination, we see that Li Hongzhi has elaborate reasoning behind his argument. First and foremost, his argument about the supernormal abilities of human beings forms an antithesis to authoritarian scientism.

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[331] Ibid., 86.
[332] Chang, *Falungong,* 86-87.

Contrary to authoritarian scientism that subjects human beings under the halo of science, Li Hongzhi promulgates a belief that human potential can develop freely and to the fullest extent. The development of "Celestial Eye" and other supernormal organs are all examples of full realization of human potential. Li Hongzhi is also against rationalism implicit in authoritarian scientism. He expresses his disagreement with the so-called undisputable communist truth by urging his followers to believe alternatively in religious revelations. Rather than answering the call to subject to the communist High Truth, believers become "gods" themselves. In addition, he demarcates a distinct boundary of a private space by urging his followers to engaging in unrestricted individual spiritual pursuit. He thus opposes the communist practice of exhorting the Chinese to become oneness with the collectivity and with the communist cause.

Li Hongzhi's advocacy of the supernormal abilities in practitioner bears a distinct imprint of his background and expertise as a religious leader. Using a language that he is well versed in, he demonstrates to his believers the "benefit" of becoming moral. In other words, spiritual transcendence becomes real and concrete. For his followers who feel helpless in various dire circumstances they find themselves in, Li Hongzhi's persuasion that they will acquire supernormal abilities is very compelling.

Li Hongzhi never departs from his inheritance of classical traditions. The theory that his believers will ultimately become god or Buddha appears to have come from the classical Buddhist belief that the final goal of a good Buddhist is to become a Buddha. Yet, in the meantime, his seemingly odd belief that practitioner-turned-Buddha will live among ordinary people in contemporary Chinese society, rather than in Nirvana, once

again, reflects the emphasis he puts on "this world." This move illustrates Li Hongzhi's constant attempt to retain a contemporary relevance of his theory.

Lending a Hand to the Weak

Another of Falungong's contribution to humanism lies in the fact that Falungong attempts to serve the interest of the majority of Chinese rather than the interests of the few elites. In contemporary China, this "majority" includes the vast numbers of the socially marginal who have not become the beneficiaries of the economic reform. As Jiao Wufeng and Li Xiaoguang confirms, "in contemporary China, the social group that belongs to the upper and middle rungs of the society are few. The majority of social groups belongs to the lower rung of the society. It is these major groups that have constituted the socially vulnerable group."[333] As we have already discussed in previous chapters, Falungong appeals mainly to the unemployed, women, old and sick, the type of people who make up the "Socially Vulnerable Group." What Falungong teaches these people to do is to "through influencing [their] view on the world, [they learn to] adjust their view on life; through changing the state of their psychological world, they reshape [their] spiritual subjectivity." This way, these people are able to live "a meaningful life, face objectively their immediate circumstances, and be prepared for life's ups and downs."[334] Falungong's attempt to save the weak reflects its consistence with the spirit of humanism. For both beliefs attach importance to human significance, human realization and freedom, human perfection, and equality among humans.

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[333] Jiao Wufeng and Li Xiaoguang, "Dui shuoshiqunti yuyi teshubaohu de falixue sikao"[Reflection on the Special Legal Protection for the Socially Vulnerable Group], *Leshan shifan xueyuan xuebao,* no. 9 (2003): 114.

[334] Zhang Fuping, "Fuyu rensheng yi jiazhi," 30.

Falungong's Symbolic Action against "Authoritarian Scientism"

Such are the ideological beliefs of Falungong in humanism. Then, what has the movement accomplished symbolically? In other words, what is Falungong's challenge to the social order of contemporary China? In the following discussion, through tracing the change of three generations in their response to the mistreatment of the Chinese leadership, I attempt to demonstrate the symbolic action of Falungong takes against the communist practice of authoritarian scientism.

The American story of Uncle Tom is a classical example of an individual who is so deferential and faithful to his master that his own dignity is sacrificed. The story is allegorical, and its significance goes far beyond mere racial confines. In the Chinese context, a similar example would be Lei Feng, the official designated role model for the Chinese people, especially for Chinese youths after 1949.[335]

Lei Feng was born into an improvised family in 1940's. After 1949, he joined the People's Liberation Army. During his service in the army, he became known for his ardent love of Mao Zedong and Communist Party, his conscientious pursuit of the Party line and his untiring political motivation and action. He later died in an accident during a military maneuver.

Throughout his adulthood, Lei had kept a diary. In the diary, he described how he made use of every available minute to study Mao's writings, whether it was break time during the day or bedtime at night. Lei regarded Mao's work as "food, weapon, and the

[335] Rhetorician Mei Zhang did an excellent study of Lei Feng as an official role model in her *Economic Reform and Official Role Models: Rhetoric and Communication of the Party Press in Post-Mao China* Ph.D. diss. (University of Pittsburgh, 1998).

steering wheel of a vehicle." After being admitted into the Communist Party in 1960, he wrote in his diary that he would forever listen to the Party and Chairman Mao, follow the Party and be Chairman Mao's good fighter.[336] Following his death, Mao Zedong had a handwritten scroll "Learn from Lei Feng." All the Chinese leaders after Mao, including Deng Xiaopeng, called on Chinese youths to emulate Lei. "Lei Feng's Diary" became an officially designated political gospel to inspired Chinese people to be as dedicated to the Party's cause as Lei.

Uncle Tom and Lei Feng lived in different cultures, social systems, and eras. But one does find some common characters in both of them. They both are in servile positions in relation to their masters. They both suffer mistreatment - in the case of Uncle Tom, it is more obvious, and in the case of Lei, it is much more subtle - but neither of them has the sensibilities to realize that their blind faithfulness and loyalty to their masters put them in a disadvantageous position; or to use the prominent philosopher on moral virtue, Thomas Hill's words, "there are usually others who profit."[337] However, there is a qualitative difference between Uncle Tom and Lei. In the case of Uncle Tom, he is aware he has rights, but he does not have the ability to demand them. In the case of Lei, he has not developed the sensibility to know about rights. He is so indoctrinated that he is unable to develop critical thinking abilities. Hill defines this kind of behavior as being "servile." Commenting on the relationship between servility and self-respect, he points out: "Servility is the absence of a certain kind of self-respect. If the effort did not require [him]/her to submit to humiliation or mistreatment, her choice would not make [him]/her as servile. To defer to an expert's judgment on matter of fact is not to be

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[336] *Lei Feng riji*[Lei Feng's Dairy] (Hongkong: Chaoyang chubanshe, 1969), 26.
[337] Thomas Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), 6.

servile, to defer to his every wish and whim is."[338] For Lei, during his lifetime, he may or may not have suffered humiliation, but his servility develops to such an extent that he had fallen a victim of being a pawn in the political games of the communist.

During the Cultural Revolution, most of the Chinese indeed emulated Lei Feng in terms of their servility. The following is a testimony of a Red Guard, representative of any Chinese youth at the time, about how she felt after being received about Mao Zedong,

> September 15th was a day I will never forget for the rest of my life. I saw the most beloved leader Chairman Mao on the balcony of Tiananmen. On this day, I became the most fortunate person in the world. Tens and thousands of words cannot describe my excited feelings... after I gave my speech, I held Chairman Mao's hand tightly. How extraordinary these pair of hands is. It was this pair of hands that liberated millions of poor people; it was this pair of hands that has been leading the Chinese revolution from one victory to another. Today, Chairman Mao shook hands with me! I will use my hands, which have been held by Chairman Mao, to hold and read the Chairman's book everyday. I am determined to hold high the great red flag of Mao Zedong's Thought, follow the Chairman to march towards communism.[339]

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[338] Ibid., 6.
[339] Jiang Pei ed., *Laoxinwen* [Old News] (Tienjing: Tienjing renmin chubanshe,1998), 52-53.

Now we understand to a certain degree how something like a Cultural Revolution could happen. When the masses are completely servile and subjugating, following the whim of a political leader, tragedies of a monumental scale are bound to happen.

In 1978, after the death of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping initiated the Economic Reform. The initiative was not only going to raise substantially the living standard of the Chinese people, but epistemologically, it is also equal to an enlightenment movement in initiating new ways of thinking. Many Chinese began to question their previous impetuous belief in communist ideology, and reevaluate their perception of the social reality, their political beliefs, and self-worth.

In 1980, a young Chinese youth named Pan Xiao wrote a letter to the editor of *China Youth*, a popular Chinese magazine, the publication of which started a nationwide discussion. His letter is entitled "Why Is the Road to Life Narrower and Narrower?" The following is an except from his letter:

> I am twenty-three years old. I should say I have just started to walk to life. But I am no longer intrigued by life's secrets and attractions. I feel as if I have walked to the end of life. Looking back at the road I have walked, it is an experience that turned from crimson red to gray, hope to disappointment and desperation; it is like a river that started from selfishness but ended with self-centeredness.
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> Before, I was filled with imaginations of and longing for life. When I was in grade school, I had heard stories about *How Steel Is Made* and *Lei Feng's*

> *Diary*.[340] Though I could not fully understand these stories, I was so excited by them that night after night I could not fall asleep.[341]

He went on to say how he witnessed factional fightings and property confiscations during the Cultural Revolution, how he was taken advantage politically by his girl friend, and how his best friend wrote his confidential conversations into a report and handed it to the authority… Pan goes on to say: "Now Social Darwinism provides me with deep revelation: people are selfish; there are no noble persons. The political propaganda [by the government] in the past is either fabricated or grossly exaggerated."[342] Pan's letter should not be viewed as a cynical venting of personal frustrations. With the sentiments of bitterness and incredulity, he realized that he has been a political dupe. His feelings are indicative of the rudimentary development of a "critical" thinking among many Chinese, befitting the period after the calamitous Cultural Revolution. Compared with Lei Feng and the Red Guard, Pan has developed a new perception about the social reality and political intrigue of the Chinese government.

By the time Falungong appeared, the political scene of Chinese society was quite different. Since Pan's time, we can say the Chinese people have finally developed an ability to demand rights, and condemn the humiliation and mistreatment from the government, which is the quality Hill defines as self-respect.[343] With the study of the

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[340] *How Steel is Made* is a novel from the former Soviet Union about a Red Army solder who, in spite of unimaginable hardships and difficulties, remains steadfast to the Communist cause. The novel was very popular from 1950s to 1960s in China.
[341] Pan Xiao, letter to the editor, *China Youth*, no. 5 (1980):8.
[342] Ibid., 8-9.
[343] Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, 6.

testimonies and written materials of Falungong, we are able to gain an insight of the inner world of the Chinese masses in present time.

The following excerpt is a letter written, in October 1999, to the representatives of the National People's Congress by a Falungong member to protest the mistreatment of Falungong members. If we use the letter to compare the testimony of the Red Guard, we see the long way the Chinese people have traveled in developing an emergent sense of self-respect:

> Now the government forbids us to speak, to the degree that 'they fear the common people as if they fear tigers'… China is so big but there is no place for us to practice Falungong safely! As the highest power-holding organ, the National People's Congress should certainly take into consideration the opinions of the common people. Otherwise whose will does the so-called 'People Congress' represent? Is it the will of tens and thousands of Falungong members? The wide Chinese people are deeply troubled by the high-handed measures the central government has meted out towards Falungong, but are not the perplexity or even opposition [towards the action of the central government] the will of the people? Have you truly thought on behalf of the common people?[344]

At first glance, we are touched by the strong indignation expressed in the letter. But upon reading the passage more closely, we see a clear demonstration of the development of the

[344] "An Open Letter to the Delegates of the National People's Congress," *China Spring* 194 (1999): 64-65.

spirit of Falungong members to demand respectful treatment from the government, a clear indication of the formation of critical consciousness.

In the study of different types of society, we have heard about the categorizations of "democratic societies" and "totalitarian societies." But Avishai Margalit, professor of social philosophy from Hebrew University and the author of *Decent Society*, proposes the concept of a "decent society" in which "[its social] institutions do not humiliate people."[345] In other words, the government respects its people. To have a decent society, responsibility runs in both directions: the government treats people as its equals and the people will have the sensibilities to demand rights if violated.

Even though what Falungong demands is something that is essential to human dignity, the Chinese leadership perceives it very differently. To them, Falungong represents a fundamental challenge to the allegiance to the communist ideology. In one of the editorials in the official newspaper to denounce Falungong, the editor says: "Our struggle against Falungong concerns the fundamental beliefs of the communist, the basic ideological foundations of the unity of the Chinese people, and the future of our Party and the country."[346] The danger to the official allegiance becomes one of the major themes in the official campaign against Falungong. Although Falungong does not have a deliberately formulated political ideology, and has not intended to overthrow the Chinese government, its action has, de facto, called for freedom to change allegiance. What Falungong has accomplished is not to change from one allegiance to another, but the freedom to change allegiance, per se. Its signals the most basic form of human freedom.

[345] Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1.
[346] "Tigao renshi renqing weihia"[Increase Awareness and See the Danger of Falungong to the Fullest Extent], *People's Daily,* July 2, 2001, overseas edition.

The appearance of Falungong signals another development. It signifies the attempt of a religious group to clamor for structural independence. To strive for structural independence means "different groups should exist around different issues; a form of coalition forms the relationship among the different domains, be they political, economic, or religious. No one should have unilateral control of another. To maintain structural independence of one group also signifies the possibility of the different ideologies. Each group, or each domain should be allowed to exercise their own set of beliefs and values." Unlike the voluntary groups in China, they are permitted to exist only on the condition that they subscribe to the communist ideology. To borrow author Karl Hertz's words in his work on voluntary association: "The maintenance of structural independence is a condition of freedom; the maintenance of vital relationships is equally a condition of meaningful freedom."[347]

Conclusion: Falungong's Implication for Chinese Political Culture

So, what does Falungong Movement mean for the political culture in China? It indicates the emergence of two changes that are to alter fundamentally the nature of Chinese political culture. As Pye gives the best description of the conventional state of affairs in his widely read work, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics,* "the first and most essential characteristic of the persisting structure of Chinese politics has been the degree to which it has been a self-contained system very little influenced by citizens or non-governmental elites. Neither in old nor in new China has there been significant informal power structure. Those without any station on the political pyramid have felt that they

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[347] Karl Hertz, "The Nature of Voluntary Association," in *Voluntary Associations: A Study of Groups in Free Societies,* ed. D.B. Robertson (Richmond, Va: John Knox Press, 1966), 33.

had no right to make open demands upon the system."[348] Since Pye's writing, the first notable change, as the appearance of the Falungong Movement suggests, is a much more inclusive politics is emerging with both the participation of both leadership and citizens. It is now different from the old status quo when elite politics dominating the political stage. What is also new now is the emergence of informal power structure, not in the sense that a structural diversity is already in place but in the sense that popular struggle for social justice is numerous and frequent, which has accumulated enormous momentum to formally challenge the official power structure. These trends are indicative of the political developments of what Pye describes "a change from wide spread subject status to an increasing number of contributing citizens, with an accompanying spread of mass participation, a greater sensitivity to the principles of equality, and a wide acceptance of universalistic laws,"[349] the hallmark of a democratic society.

New changes in the Chinese political culture have not been limited to widening of political participation. Social conflicts are becoming a permanent fixture in the political scene of the contemporary Chinese society. One remembers the old times when Chinese politics enjoyed stability. The official establishment had always put paramount emphasis on conformity and order; it is anxious about any potential disorder and conflict. Social harmony is possible because of an acquiescent mentality of the common Chinese people. Such an attitude had made a homogenous political culture possible. Now, the common Chinese are increasingly developing new perceptions. They are discarding the old servile mentality, developing self-respect, and nurturing a heightened sensitivity to

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[348] Lucian Pye, *Spirit of Chinese Politics,* New Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 14.

[349] Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 13.

social injustice. In contrast, rather than thinking anew and adjusting to new political developments and social transformation, the Chinese leadership clings to the old mentality of regulating change without initiating any political reform. When two such mentalities clash, it is evitable that conflicts will rise.

Even though my current research on Falungong is a case study, it is meant to be a lesson for us to learn the movement's significance in the overall social progress in China. In other words, the occurrence of Falungong is not a single and isolated incidence, but a microcosm of wider development in the Chinese society. It is barometer of a general trend of mass struggle within China. For example, according to statistics released by China Department of Public Securities, in 2003, incidents of social unrest in China reached 58,000, with 300,000 citizens participating in them. It was a fifteen increase from the previous year.[350] To use a metaphor here, the incidence of Falungong only represents the tip of a volcano. Falungong has been the most visible and largest scale movement of the increasingly frequent mass struggles for justice and humanity in China.

[350] Chinese News Digest, "Meiri xinwen zhaiayo"[Daily News Digest], July 16, 2004. http://cnd.org (accessed July 16, 2004).

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